# When Love Calls

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BY

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# When Love Calls

## I

### HER STORY

"CLARE," I said, "I wish that we had brought some better clothes, if it were only one frock. You look the oddest figure."

And she did. She was lying head to head with me on the thick moss that clothed one part of the river-bank above Breistolen near the Sogn Fiord. We were staying at Breistolen, but there was no moss thereabouts, nor in all the Sogn district, I often thought, so deep and soft, and so dazzling orange and white and crimson as that particular patch. It lay quite high upon the hills, and there were great gray boulders peeping through the moss here and there, very fit to break your legs if you were careless. Little more than a mile higher up was the watershed, where our river, putting away with reluctance a first thought of going down the farther slope towards Bysberg, parted from its twin

brother who was thither bound with scores upon scores of puny green-backed fishlets; and instead, came down our side gliding and swishing, and swirling faster and faster, and deeper and wider, every hundred yards to Breistolen, full of red-speckled yellow trout all half-a-pound apiece, and very good to eat.

But they were not so sweet or toothsome to our girlish tastes as the tawny-orange cloud-berries which Clare and I were eating as we lay. So busy was she with the luscious pile we had gathered that I had to wait for an answer. And then, "Speak for yourself," she said. "I'm sure you look like a short-coated baby. He is somewhere up the river too." Munch, munch, munch!

"Who is, you impertinent, greedy little chit?"

"Oh, you know," she answered. "Don't you wish you had your gray plush here, Bab?"

I flung a look of calm disdain at her; but whether it was the berry juice which stained our faces that took from its effect, or the free mountain air which papa says saps the foundations of despotism, that made her callous, at any rate she only laughed scornfully and got up and went off down the stream with her rod, leaving me to finish the cloud-berries, and stare lazily up at the snow

patches on the hillside — which somehow put me in mind of the gray plush — and follow or not as I liked.

Clare has a wicked story of how I gave in to papa, and came to start without anything but those rough clothes. She says he said — and Jack Buchanan has told me that lawyers put no faith in anything that he says she says, or she says he says, which proves how much truth there is in this — that if Bab took none but her oldest clothes, and fished all day and had no one to run upon her errands — he meant Jack and the others, I suppose — she might possibly grow an inch in Norway. Just as if I wanted to grow an inch! An inch indeed! I am five feet one and a half high, and papa, who puts me an inch shorter, is the worst measurer in the world. As for Miss Clare, she would give all her inches for my eyes. So there!

After Clare left, it began to be dull and chilly. When I had pictured to myself how nice it would be to dress for dinner again, and chosen the frock I would wear upon the first evening, I grew tired of the snow patches, and started up stream, stumbling and falling into holes, and clambering over rocks, and only careful to save my rod and my face. It was no occasion for the gray plush, but

I had made up my mind to reach a pool which lay, I knew, a little above me, having filched a yellow-bodied fly from Clare's hat with a view to that particular place.

Our river did the oddest things hereabouts — pleased to be so young, I suppose. It was not a great churning stream of snow water foaming and milky, such as we had seen in some parts, streams that affected to be always in flood, and had the look of forcing the rocks asunder and clearing their path even while you watched them with your fingers in your ears. Our river was none of these: still it was swifter than English rivers are wont to be, and in parts deeper, and transparent as glass. In one place it would sweep over a ledge and fall wreathed in spray into a spreading lake of black, rock-bound water. Then it would narrow again until, where you could almost jump across, it darted smooth and unbroken down a polished shoot with a swoop like a swallow's. Out of this it would hurry afresh to brawl along a gravelly bed, skipping jauntily over first one and then another ridge of stones that had silted up weir-wise and made as if they would bar the channel. Under the lee of these there were lovely pools.

To be able to throw into mine, I had to walk

out along the ridge on which the water was shallow, yet sufficiently deep to cover my boots. But I was well rewarded. The "forellin" — the Norse name for trout, and as pretty as their girls' wavy fair hair — were rising so merrily that I hooked and landed one in five minutes, the fly falling from its mouth as it touched the stones. I hate taking out hooks. I used at one time to leave the fly in the fish's mouth to be removed by papa at the weighing house ; until Clare pricked her tongue at dinner with an almost new, red tackle, and was so mean as to keep it, though I remembered then what I had done with it, and was certain it was mine — which was nothing less than dishonest of her.

I had just got back to my place and made a fine cast, when there came — not the leap, and splash, and tug which announced the half-pounder — but a deep, rich gurgle as the fly was gently sucked under, and then a quiet, growing strain upon the line, which began to move away down the pool in a way that made the winch spin again and filled me with mysterious pleasure. I was not conscious of striking or of anything but that I had hooked a really good fish, and I clutched the rod with both hands and set my feet as tightly as I could upon the slippery gravel. The line moved up and down,

and this way and that, now steadily and as with a purpose, and then again with an eccentric rush that made the top of the rod spring and bend so that I looked for it to snap each moment. My hands began to grow numb, and the landing-net, hitherto an ornament, fell out of my waist-belt and went I knew not whither. I suppose I must have stepped unwittingly into deeper water, for I felt that my skirts were afloat, and altogether things were going dreadfully against me, when the presence of an ally close at hand was announced by a cheery shout from the far side of the river.

"Keep up your point! Keep up your point!" some one cried briskly. "That is better!"

The unexpected sound — it was a man's voice — did something to keep my heart up. But for answer I could only shriek, "I can't! It will break!" watching the top of my rod as it jigged up and down, very much in the fashion of Clare performing what she calls a waltz. She dances as badly as a man.

"No, it will not," he cried back, bluntly. "Keep it up, and let out a little line with your fingers when he pulls hardest."

We were forced to shout and scream. The wind had risen and was adding to the noise of the

water. Soon I heard him wading behind me. "Where 's your landing net?" he asked, with the most provoking coolness.

"Oh, in the pool! Somewhere about. I am sure I don't know," I answered wildly.

What he said to this I could not catch, but it sounded rude. And then he waded off to fetch, as I guessed, his own net. By the time he reached me again I was in a sad plight, feet like ice, and hands benumbed, while the wind, and rain, and hail, which had come down upon us with a sudden violence, unknown, it is to be hoped, anywhere else, were mottling my face all sorts of unbecoming colors. But the line was taut. And wet and cold went for nothing five minutes later, when the fish lay upon the bank, its prismatic sides slowly turning pale and dull, and I knelt over it half in pity and half in triumph, but wholly forgetful of the wind and rain.

"You did that very pluckily, little one," said the on-looker; "but I am afraid you will suffer for it by and by. You must be chilled through."

Quickly as I looked up at him, I only met a good-humored smile. He did not mean to be rude. And, after all, when I was in such a mess it was not possible that he could see what I was

like. He was wet enough himself. The rain was streaming from the brim of the soft hat which he had turned down to shelter his face, and trickling from his chin, and turning his shabby Norfolk jacket a darker shade. As for his hands, they looked red and knuckly enough, and he had been wading almost to his waist. But he looked, I don't know why, all the stronger and manlier and nicer for these things, because, perhaps, he cared for them not one whit. What I looked like myself I dared not think. My skirts were as short as short could be, and they were soaked: most of my hair was unplaited, my gloves were split, and my sodden boots were out of shape. I was forced, too, to shiver and shake from cold; which was provoking, for I knew it made me seem half as small again.

"Thank you, I am a little cold, Mr. ——, Mr. ——," I said, grave, only my teeth would chatter so that he laughed outright as he took me up with —

"Herapath. And to whom have I the honor of speaking?"

"I am Miss Guest," I said, miserably. It was too cold to be frigid to advantage.

"Commonly called Bab, I think," the wretch answered. "The walls of our hut are not sound-

proof, you see. But, come, the sooner you get back to dry clothes and the stove, the better, Bab. You can cross the river just below, and cut off half-a-mile that way."

"I can't," I said, obstinately. Bab, indeed! How dared he?

"Oh, yes, you can," with intolerable good-temper. "You shall take your rod and I the prey. You cannot be wetter than you are now."

He had his way, of course, since I did not foresee that at the ford he would lift me up bodily and carry me over the deeper part without a pretence of asking leave, or a word of apology. It was done so quickly that I had no time to remonstrate. Still I was not going to let it pass, and when I had shaken myself straight again, I said, with all the haughtiness I could assume, "Don't you think, Mr. Herapath, that it would have been more — more —"

"Polite to offer to carry you over, child? No, not at all. It will be wiser and warmer for you to run down the hill. Come along!"

And without more ado, while I was still choking with rage, he seized my hands and set off at a trot, lugging me through the sloppy places much as I have seen a nurse drag a fractious child down

Constitution Hill. It was not wonderful that I soon lost the little breath his speech had left me, and was powerless to complain when we reached the bridge. I could only thank heaven that there was no sign of Clare. I think I should have died of mortification if she had seen us come down the hill hand-in-hand in that ridiculous fashion. But she had gone home, and at any rate I escaped that degradation.

A wet stool-car and wetter pony were dimly visible on the bridge; to which, as we came up, a damp urchin creeping from some crevice added himself. I was pushed in as if I had no will of my own, the gentleman sprang up beside me, the boy tucked himself away somewhere behind, and the little "teste" set off at a canter, so deceived by the driver's excellent imitation of "Pss," the Norse for "Tchk," that in ten minutes we were at home.

"Well, I never!" Clare said, surveying me from a respectful distance, when at last I was safe in our room. "I would not be seen in such a state by a man for all the fish in the sea!"

And she looked so tall, and trim, and neat, that it was the more provoking. At the moment I was too miserable to answer her, and had to find com-

fort in promising myself, that when we were back in Bolton Gardens I would see that Fräulein kept Miss Clare's pretty nose to the grindstone though it were ever so much her last term, or Jack were ever so fond of her. Papa was in the plot against me, too. What right had he to thank Mr. Herapath for bringing "his little girl" home safe? He can be pompous enough at times. I never knew a stout Queen's Counsel — and papa is stout — who was not, any more than a thin one, who did not contradict. It is in their patents, I think.

Mr. Herapath dined with us that evening — if fish and potatoes and boiled eggs, and sour bread and pancakes, and claret and coffee can be called a dinner — but nothing I could do, though I made the best of my wretched frock and was as stiff as Clare herself, could alter his first impression. It was too bad: he had no eyes! He either could not or would not see any one but the draggled Bab — fifteen at most and a very tom-boy — whom he had carried across the river. He styled Clare, who talked Baedeker to him in her primmest and most precocious way, Miss Guest, and once at least during the evening dubbed me plain Bab. I tried to freeze him with a look then, and papa gave him a

taste of the pompous manner, saying coldly that I was older than I seemed. But it was not a bit of use: I could see that he set it all down to the grand airs of a spoiled child. If I had put my hair up, it might have opened his eyes, but Clare teased me about it and I was too proud for that.

When I asked him if he was fond of dancing, he said good-naturedly, "I don't visit very much, Miss Bab. I am generally engaged in the evening."

Here was a chance. I was going to say that that no doubt was the reason why I had never met him, when papa ruthlessly cut me short by asking, "You are not in the law?"

"No," he replied. "I am in the London Fire Brigade."

I think that we all upon the instant saw him in a helmet sitting at the door of the fire station by St. Martin's Church. Clare turned crimson and papa seemed on a sudden to call his patent to mind. The moment before I had been as angry as angry could be with our guest, but I was not going to look on and see him snubbed when he was dining with us and all. So I rushed into the gap as quickly as surprise would let me with "Good gracious, how nice! Do tell me all about a fire!"

It made matters — my matters — worse, for I could have cried with vexation when I read in his face next moment that he had looked for their astonishment; while the ungrateful fellow set down my eager remark to mere childish ignorance.

"Some time I will," he said with a quiet smile *de haut en bas;* "but I do not often attend one in person. I am Captain ——'s private secretary, aide-de-camp, and general factotum."

And it turned out that he was the son of a certain Canon Herapath, so that papa lost sight of his patent box altogether, and they set to discussing Mr. Gladstone, while I slipped off to bed feeling as small as I ever did in my life and out of temper with everybody. It was a long time since I had been used to young men talking politics to papa, when they could talk — politics — to me.

Possibly I deserved the week of vexation which followed; but it was almost more than I could bear. He — Mr. Herapath, of course — was always about fishing or lounging outside the little white posting-house, taking walks and meals with us, and seeming heartily to enjoy papa's society. He came with us when we drove to the top of the pass to get a glimpse of the Sulethid peak; and it looked so brilliantly clear and softly beautiful as it

seemed to float, just tinged with color, in a far-off atmosphere of its own, beyond the dark ranges of nearer hills, that I began to think at once of the drawing-room in Bolton Gardens with a cosy fire burning, and afternoon tea coming up. The tears came into my eyes, and he saw them before I could turn away from the view; and said to papa that he feared his little girl was tired as well as cold — and so spoiled all my pleasure. I looked back afterwards as papa and I drove down: he was walking by Clare's carcole and they were laughing heartily.

And that was the way always. He was such an elder brother to me — a thing I never had and do not want — that a dozen times a day I set my teeth viciously together and said to myself that if ever we met in London — but what nonsense that was, because, of course, it mattered nothing to me what he was thinking, only he had no right to be so rudely familiar. That was all; but it was quite enough to make me dislike him.

However, a sunny morning in the holidays is a cheerful thing, and when I strolled down stream with my rod on the day after our expedition, I felt I could enjoy myself very nearly as much as I had before his coming spoiled our party. I dawdled

along, now trying a pool, now clambering up the hillsides to pick raspberries, and now counting the magpies that flew across, feeling altogether very placid and good and contented. I had chosen the lower river because Mr. Herapath usually fished the upper part, and I would not be ruffled this nice day. So I was the more vexed to come suddenly upon him fishing; and fishing where he had no right to be. Papa had spoken to him about the danger of it, and he had as good as said he would not do it again. Yet there he was, thinking, I dare say, that we should not know. It was a spot where one bank rose into quite a cliff, frowning over a deep pool at the foot of some falls. Close to the cliff the water still ran with the speed of a mill-race, so fast as to endanger a good swimmer. But on the far side of this current there was a bit of slack water which was tempting enough to have set some one's wits to work to devise means to fish it, which from the top of the cliff was impossible. Just above the water was a ledge, a foot wide, perhaps, which might have done, only it did not reach to this end of the cliff. However, that foolhardy person had espied this, and got over the gap by bridging the latter with a bit of plank, and then had drowned himself or gone away, in either

case leaving his board to tempt others to do likewise.

And there was Mr. Herapath fishing from the ledge. It made me giddy to look at him. The rock overhung the water so much that he could not stand upright; the first person who got there must surely have learned to curl himself up from much sleeping in Norwegian beds, which were short for me. I thought of this oddly enough as I watched him, and laughed, and was for going on. But when I had walked a few yards, meaning to pass round the rear of the cliff, I began to fancy all sorts of foolish things would happen. I felt sure that I should have no more peace or pleasure if I left him there. I hesitated. Yes, I would. I would go down, and ask him to leave the place; and, of course, he would do it.

I lost no time, but ran down the slope smartly and carelessly. My way lay over loose shale mingled with large stones, and it was steep. It is wonderful how quickly an accident happens; how swiftly a thing that cannot be undone is done, and we are left wishing — oh, so vainly — that we could put the world, and all things in it, back by a few seconds. I was checking myself near the bottom, when a big stone on which I stepped

moved under me. The shale began to slip in a mass, and the stone to roll. It was all done in a moment. I stayed myself, that was easy enough, but the stone took two bounds, jumped sideways, struck the piece of board which was only resting lightly at either end, and before I could take it all in the little bridge plunged end first into the current, which swept it out of sight in an instant.

He threw up his hands in affright, for he had turned, and we both saw it happen. He made indeed as if he would try to save it, but that was impossible; and then, while I cowered in dismay, he waved his arm to me in the direction of home — again and again. The roar of the falls drowned what he said, but I guessed his meaning. I could not help him myself, but I could fetch help. It was three miles to Breistolen, rough, rocky ones, and I doubted whether he could keep his cramped position with that noise deafening him, and the endless whirling stream before his eyes, while I was going and coming. But there was no better way I could think of; and even as I wavered, he signalled to me again imperatively. For an instant everything seemed to go round with me, but it was not the time for that yet, and I tried to collect myself, and harden my heart. Up the

bank I went steadily, and once at the top set off at a run homewards.

I cannot tell at all how I did it; how I passed over the uneven ground, or whether I went quickly or slowly save by the reckoning papa made afterwards. I can only remember one long hurrying scramble; now I panted uphill, now I ran down, now I was on my face in a hole, breathless and half-stunned, and now I was up to my knees in water. I slipped and dropped down places I should at other times have shrunk from, and hurt myself so that I bore the marks for months. But I thought nothing of these things: all my being was spent in hurrying on for his life, the clamor of every cataract I passed seeming to stop my heart's beating with very fear. So I reached Breistolen and panted over the bridge and up to the little white house lying so quiet in the afternoon sunshine, papa's stool-car even then at the door ready to take him to some favorite pool. Somehow I made him understand in broken words that Herapath was in danger, drowning already, for all I knew, and then I seized a great pole which was leaning against the porch, and climbed into the car. Papa was not slow either; he snatched a coil of rope from the luggage, and away we went, a man

and boy whom he had hastily called running behind us. We had lost very little time, but so much may happen in so little time.

We were forced to leave the car a quarter of a mile from that part of the river, and walk or run the rest of the way. We all ran, even papa, as I had never known him run before. My heart sank at the groan he let escape him when I pointed out the spot. We came to it one by one and we all looked. The ledge was empty. Jem Herapath was gone. I suppose it startled me. At any rate I could only look at the water in a dazed way, and cry quietly without much feeling that it was my doing; while the men, shouting to one another in strange, hushed voices, searched about for any sign of his fate — "Jem! Jem Herapath!" So he had written his name only yesterday in the travellers' book at the posting-house, and I had sullenly watched him from the window, and then had sneaked to the book and read it. That was yesterday, and now! Oh, Jem, to hear you say "Bab" once more!

"Bab! Why, Miss Bab, what is the matter?"

Safe and sound! Yes, there he was when I turned, safe, and strong, and cool, rod in hand, and a quiet smile in his eyes. Just as I had seen him

yesterday, and thought never to see him again ; and saying " Bab " exactly as of old, so that something in my throat — it may have been anger at his rudeness, but I do not think it was — prevented me saying a word until all the others came round us, and a babel of Norse and English, and something that was neither, yet both, set in.

" But how is this ? " objected my father when he could be heard, " you are quite dry, my boy ? "

" Dry ! Why not, sir ? For goodness' sake, what is the matter ? "

" The matter ! Did n't you fall in, or something of the kind ? " papa asked, bewildered by this new aspect of the case.

" It does not look like it, does it? Your daughter gave me a very uncomfortable start by nearly doing so."

Every one looked at him for an explanation. " How did you manage to get from the ledge ? " I said feebly. Where was the mistake ? I had not dreamed it.

" From the ledge ? Why, by the other end, to be sure, so that I had to walk back round the hill. Still I did not mind, for I was thankful that it was the plank and not you that fell in.

" I — I thought — you could not get from the

ledge," I muttered. The possibility of getting off at the other end had never occurred to me, and so I had made such a simpleton of myself. It was too absurd, too ridiculous. It was no wonder that they all screamed with laughter at the fool's errand they had come upon, and stamped about and clung to one another. But when *he* laughed too — and he did until the tears came into his eyes — there was not an ache or pain in my body — and I had cut my wrist to the bone against a splinter of rock — that hurt me one-half as much. Surely *he* might have seen another side to it. But he did not; and so I managed to hide my bandaged wrist from him, and papa drove me home. There I broke down entirely, and Clare put me to bed, and petted me, and was very good to me. And when I came down next day, with an ache in every part of me, he was gone.

"He asked me to tell you," said Clare, not looking up from the fly she was tying at the window, "that he thought you were the bravest girl he had ever met."

So he understood now, when others had explained it to him. "No, Clare," I said coldly, "he did not say that exactly; he said 'the bravest little girl.'" For indeed, lying upstairs with the win-

dow open, I had heard him set off on his long drive to Laerdalsören. As for papa, he was half-proud and half-ashamed of my foolishness, and wholly at a loss to think how I could have made the mistake.

"You've generally some common-sense, my dear," he said that day at dinner, "and how in the world you could have been so ready to fancy the man was in danger, I — can — not — imagine!"

"Papa," put in Clare, suddenly, "your elbow is upsetting the salt."

And as I had to move my seat just then to avoid the glare of the stove which was falling on my face, we never thought it out.

## II

### HIS STORY

I WAS not dining out much at that time, partly because my acquaintance in town was limited, and something too because I cared little for it. But these were pleasant people, the old gentleman witty and amusing, the children, lively girls, nice to look at and good to talk with. The party had too a holiday flavor about them wholesome to recall in Scotland Yard: and as I had thought, play-time over, I should see no more of them, I was proportionately pleased to find that Mr. Guest had not forgotten me, and pleased also — shrewdly expecting that we might kill our fish over again — to regard his invitation to dinner at a quarter-to-eight as a royal command.

But if I took it so, I was sadly wanting in the regal courtesy to match. What with one delay owing to work that would admit of none, and another caused by a cabman strange to the ways of town, it was twenty-five minutes after the hour

named, when I reached Bolton Gardens. A stately man, so like the Queen's Counsel, that it was plain upon whom the latter modelled himself, ushered me straight into the dining-room, where Guest greeted me very kindly, and met my excuses by apologies on his part — for preferring, I suppose, the comfort of eleven people to mine. Then he took me down the table, and said, " My daughter," and Miss Guest shook hands with me and pointed to the chair at her left. I had still, as I unfolded my napkin, to say " Clear, if you please," and then I was free to turn and apologize to her, being a little shy, and, as I have said, a somewhat infrequent diner out.

I think that I never saw so remarkable a likeness — to her younger sister — in my life. She might have been little Bab herself, but for her dress and some striking differences. Miss Guest could not be more than eighteen, in form almost as fairy-like as the little one, with the same child-like, innocent look on her face. She had the big, gray eyes, too, that were so charming in Bab; but in her they were more soft and tender and thoughtful, and a thousand times more charming. Her hair too was brown and wavy: only, instead of hanging loose or in a pig-tail anywhere and anyhow in a fashion

I well remembered, it was coiled in a coronal on the shapely little head, that was so Greek, and in its gracious, stately, old-fashioned pose, so unlike Bab's. Her dress, of some creamy, gauzy stuff, revealed the prettiest white throat in the world, and arms decked in pearls, and, so far, no more recalled my little fishing-mate than the sedate self-possession and assured dignity of this girl, as she talked to her other neighbor, suggested Bab making pancakes and chattering with the landlady's children in her strangely and wonderfully acquired Norse. It was not Bab in fact: and yet it almost might have been: an etherealized, queenly, womanly Bab. Who presently turned to me —

"Have you quite settled down after your holiday?" she asked, staying the apologies I was for pouring into her ear.

"I had until this evening, but the sight of your father is like a breath of fiord air. I hope your sisters are well."

"My sisters?" she murmured wonderingly, her fork half-way to her pretty mouth and her attitude one of questioning.

"Yes," I said rather puzzled. "You know they were with your father when I had the good fortune to meet him. Miss Clare and Bab."

"Eh?" dropping her fork on the plate with a great clatter.

"Yes, Miss Guest, Miss Clare and Miss Bab."

I really began to feel uncomfortable. Her color rose, and she looked me in the face in a half-proud, half-fearful way as if she resented the inquiry. It was a relief to me, when, with some show of confusion, she at length stammered, "Oh, yes, I beg your pardon, of course they were! How very foolish of me. They are quite well, thank you," and so was silent again. But I understood now. Mr. Guest had omitted to mention my name, and she had taken me for some one else of whose holiday she knew. I gathered from the aspect of the table and the room that the Guests saw a good deal of company, and it was a very natural mistake, though by the grave look she bent upon her plate it was clear that the young hostess was taking herself to task for it: not without, if I might judge from the lurking smile at the corners of her mouth, a humorous sense of the slip, and perhaps of the difference between myself and the gentleman whose part I had been unwittingly supporting. Meanwhile I had a chance of looking at her unchecked; and thought of Dresden china, she was so frail and pretty.

"You were nearly drowned, or something of the kind, were you not?" she asked, after an interval during which we had both talked to others.

"Well, not precisely. Your sister fancied I was in danger, and behaved in the pluckiest manner — so bravely that I can almost feel sorry that the danger was not there to dignify her heroism."

"That was like her," she answered in a tone just a little scornful. "You must have thought her a terrible tomboy."

While she was speaking there came one of those dreadful lulls in the talk, and Mr. Guest overhearing, cried, "Who is that you are abusing, my dear? Let us all share in the sport. If it's Clare, I think I can name one who is a far worse hoyden upon occasion."

"It is no one of whom you have ever heard, papa," she answered, archly. "It is a person in whom Mr. — Mr. Herapath — " I had murmured my name as she stumbled — "and I are interested. Now tell me, did you not think so?" she murmured, graciously leaning the slightest bit towards me, and opening her eyes as they looked into mine in a way that to a man who had spent the day in a dusty room in Great Scotland Yard was sufficiently intoxicating.

"No," I said, lowering my voice in imitation of hers. "No, Miss Guest, I did not think so at all. I thought your sister a brave little thing, rather careless as children are apt to be, but likely to grow into a charming girl."

I wondered, marking how she bit her lip and refrained from assent, whether, impossible as it must seem to any one looking in her face, there might not be something of the shrew about my beautiful neighbor. Her tone when she spoke of her sister seemed to impart no great goodwill.

"So that is your opinion?" she said, after a pause. "Do you know," with a laughing glance, "that some people think I am like her."

"Yes?" I answered, gravely. "Well, I should be able to judge, who have seen you both and yet am not an old friend. And I think you are both like and unlike. Your sister has very beautiful eyes" — she lowered hers swiftly — "and hair like yours, but her manner and style were very different. I can no more fancy Bab in your place than I can picture you, Miss Guest, as I saw her for the first time — and on many after occasions," I added, laughing as much to cover my own hardihood as at the queer little figure I had conjured up.

"Thank you, Mr. Herapath," she replied, with

coldness, though she had blushed darkly to her ears. "That, I think, must be enough of compliments, for to-night — as you are not an old friend." And she turned away, leaving me to curse my folly in saying so much, when our acquaintance was as yet in the bud, and as susceptible to over-warmth as to a temperature below zero.

A moment later the ladies left us. The flush I had brought to her cheek still lingered there, as she swept past me with a wondrous show of dignity in one so young. Mr. Guest came down and took her place, and we talked of the "land of berries," and our adventures there, while the rest — older friends — listened indulgently or struck in from time to time with their own biggest fish and deadliest flies.

I used to wonder why women like to visit dusty chambers; why they get more joy — I am fain to think they do — out of a scrambling tea up three pairs of stairs in Pump Court, than from the very same materials — and comfort withal — in their own house. I imagine it is for the same reason that the bachelor finds a singular charm in a lady's drawing-room, and there, if anywhere, sees her with a reverent mind. A charm and a subservience which I felt to the full in the Guests' draw-

ing-room — a room rich in subdued colors and a cunning blending of luxury and comfort. Yet it depressed me. I felt alone. Mr. Guest had passed on to others and I stood aside, the sense that I was not of these people troubling me in a manner as new as it was absurd: for I had been in the habit of rather despising "society." Miss Guest was at the piano, the centre of a circle of soft light, which showed up also a keen-faced, dark-whiskered man leaning over her with the air of one used to the position. Every one else was so fully engaged that I may have looked, as well as felt, forlorn, and meeting her eyes could have fancied she was regarding me with amusement — almost triumph. It must have been mere fancy, bred of self-consciousness, for the next moment she beckoned me to her, and said to her cavalier:

"There, Jack, Mr. Herapath is going to talk to me about Norway now, so that I don't want you any longer. Perhaps you won't mind stepping up to the schoolroom — Fräulein and Clare are there — and telling Clare, that — that — oh, anything."

There is no piece of ill-breeding so bad to my mind as for a man who is at home in a house to flaunt his favor in the face of other guests. That young lawyer's manner as he left her, and the smile

of perfect intelligence which passed between them, were such a breach of good manners as would have ruffled any one. They ruffled me — yes, me, although it was no concern of mine what she called him, or how he conducted himself — so that I could do nothing but stand by the piano and sulk. One bear makes another, you know.

She did not speak; and I, content to watch the slender hands stealing over the keys, would not, until my eyes fell upon her right wrist. She had put off her bracelets and so disclosed a scar upon it, something about which — not its newness — so startled me that I said abruptly: "That is very strange! Pray tell me how you did it?"

She looked up, saw what I meant, and stopping hastily, put on her bracelets; to all appearance so vexed by my thoughtless question, and anxious to hide the mark, that I was quick to add humbly, "I asked because your sister hurt her wrist in nearly the same place on the day when she thought I was in trouble, and the coincidence struck me."

"Yes, I remember," looking at me, I thought, with a certain suspicion, as though she were not sure that I was giving the right motive. "I did this much in the same way. By falling, I mean. Is n't it a hateful disfigurement?"

No, it was no disfigurement. Even to her, with a woman's love of conquest, it must have seemed anything but a disfigurement had she known what the quiet, awkward man at her side was thinking, who stood looking shyly at it and found no words to contradict her, though she asked him twice, and thought him stupid enough. A great longing to kiss that soft, scarred wrist was on me — and Miss Guest had added another to the number of her slaves. I don't know now why that little scar should have so touched me any more than I then could guess why, being a commonplace person, I should fall in love at first sight, and feel no surprise at my condition, but only a half consciousness (seeming fully to justify it) that in some former state of being I had met my love, and read her thoughts, and learned her moods; and come to know the bright womanly spirit that looked from her frank eyes as well as if she were an old, old friend. And so vivid was this sensation, that once or twice, then and afterwards, when I would meet her glance, another name than hers trembled on my tongue and passed away before I could shape it into sound.

After an interval, "Are you going to the Goldmace's dance?"

"No," I answered her, humbly. "I go out so little."

"Indeed," with an odd smile not too kindly; "I wish — no I don't — that we could say the same. We are engaged, I think —" she paused, her attention divided between myself and Boccherini's minuet, the low strains of which she was sending through the room — "for every afternoon — this week — except Saturday. By the way, Mr. Herapath — do you remember what was the name — Bab told me you teased her with?"

"Wee bonnie Bab," I answered absently. My thoughts had gone forward to Saturday. We are always dropping to-day's substance for the shadow of to-morrow; like the dog — a dog was it not? — in the fable."

"Oh, yes, wee bonnie Bab," she murmured softly. "Poor Bab!" and suddenly cut short Boccherini's music and our chat by striking a terrific discord and laughing merrily at my start of discomfiture. Every one took it as a signal to leave. They all seemed to be going to meet her again next day, or the day after that; they engaged her for dances, and made up a party for the law courts, and tossed to and fro a score of laughing catch-words, that were beyond my comprehension. They all did this, except myself.

And yet I went away with something before me — that call upon Saturday afternoon. Quite unreasonably I fancied I should see her alone. And so when the day came and I stood outside the opening door of the drawing-room, and heard voices and laughter within, I was hurt and aggrieved beyond measure. There was quite a party, and a merry one, assembled, who were playing at some game, as it seemed to me, for I caught sight of Clare whipping off an impromptu bandage from her eyes, and striving by her stiffest air to give the lie to a pair of flushed cheeks. The black-whiskered man was there, and two men of his kind, and a German governess, and a very old lady in a wheel-chair, who was called "grandmamma," and Miss Guest herself looking, in the prettiest dress of silvery plush, to the full as bright and fair and graceful as I had been picturing her each hour since we parted.

She dropped me a stately courtesy. "Will you play the part of Miss Carolina Wilhelmina Amelia Skeggs, Mr. Herapath, while I act honest Burchell, and say "Fudge!" or will you burn nuts and play games with neighbor Flamborough? You will join us, won't you? Clare does not so misbehave every day, only it is such a wet afternoon and so

cold and wretched, and we did not think there would be any more callers — and tea will be up in five minutes."

She did not think there would be any more callers! Something in her smile belied the words and taught me that she had thought — she had known — that there would be one more caller — one who would burn nuts and play games with her, though Rome itself were afire, and Tooley Street and the Mile End Road to boot.

It was a simple game enough, and not likely, one would say, to afford much risk of that burning the fingers, which gave a zest to the Vicar of Wakefield's nuts. One sat in the middle blindfolded, while the rest disguised their own or assumed each other's voices, and spoke one by one some gibe or quip at his expense. When he succeeded in naming the speaker, the detected satirist put on the poke, and in his turn heard things good — if he had a conceit of himself — for his soul's health. Now this *rôle* unhappily soon fell to me, and proved a heavy one, because I was not so familiar with the others' voices as were the rest; and Miss Guest — whose faintest tones I thought to have known — had a wondrous knack of cheating me, now taking off Clare's voice, and now — after

the door had been opened to admit the tea — her father's. So I failed again and again to earn my release. But when a voice behind me cried with well-feigned eagerness —

"How nice! Do tell me all about a fire!"

Though no fresh creaking at the door had reached me, nor warning been given of an addition to the players, I had not the smallest doubt who was the speaker; but exclaimed at once, "That is Bab! Now I cry you mercy. I am right this time. That was Bab!"

I looked for a burst of applause and laughter, such as had before attended a good thrust home, but none came. On the contrary, with my words so odd a silence fell upon the room that it was clear that something was wrong, and I pulled off my handkerchief in haste, repeating, "That was Bab, I am sure."

But if it was, I could not see her. What had come over them all? Jack's face wore a provoking smile, and his friends were clearly bent upon sniggering. Clare looked horrified, and grandmamma gently titillated, while Miss Guest, who had risen and half turned away towards the windows, seemed to be in a state of proud confusion. What was the matter?

"I beg every one's pardon by anticipation," I said, looking round in a bewildered way: "but have I said anything wrong?"

"Oh, dear no," cried the fellow they called Jack, with a familiarity that was in the worst taste — as if I had meant to apologize to him! "Most natural thing in the world!"

"Jack, how dare you?" exclaimed Miss Guest, stamping her foot.

"Well it seemed all right. It sounded very natural, I am sure."

"Oh, you are unbearable! Why don't you say something, Clare?"

"Mr. Herapath, I am sure that you did not know that my name was Barbara."

"Certainly not," I cried. "What a strange thing!"

"But it is, and that is why grandmamma is looking so shocked, and Mr. Buchanan is wearing threadbare an old friend's privilege of being rude. I freely forgive you if you will make allowance for him. And you shall come off the stool of repentance and have your tea first, since you are the greatest stranger. It is a stupid game after all!"

She would hear no apologies from me. And

when I would have asked why her sister bore the same name, and thus excused myself, she was intent upon tea-making, and the few moments I could with decency add to my call gave me scant opportunity. I blush to think how I eked them out, by what subservience to Clare, by what a slavish anxiety to help even Jack to muffins — each piece I hoped might choke him. How slow I was to find hat and gloves, calling to mind with terrible vividness, as I turned my back upon the circle, that again and again in my experience, an acquaintance begun by a dinner had ended with the consequent call. And so I should have gone — it might have been so here — but that the door-handle was stiff, and Miss Guest came to my aid, as I fumbled with it. "We are always at home on Saturdays, if you like to call, Mr. Herapath," she murmured carelessly, not lifting her eyes — and I found myself in the street.

So carelessly she said it, that with a sudden change of feeling I vowed I would not call. Why should I? Why should I worry myself with the sight of those other fellows parading their favor? With the babble of that society chit-chat, which I had so often scorned, and — and still scorned, and had no part or concern in. They were not people

to suit me, or do me good. I would not go, I said, and repeated it firmly on Monday and Tuesday; on Wednesday only so far modified it that I thought at some distant time to leave a card — to avoid discourtesy; — on Friday preferred an earlier date as wiser and more polite, and on Saturday walked shame-faced down the street and knocked and rang, and went upstairs — to taste a pleasant misery. Yes, and on the next Saturday too, and the next, and the next; and that one on which we all went to the theatre, and that other one on which Mr. Guest kept me to dinner. Ay, and on other days that were not Saturdays, among which two stand high out of the waters of forgetfulness — high days indeed — days like twin pillars of Hercules, through which I thought to reach, as did the seamen of old, I knew not what treasures of unknown lands stretching away under the setting sun. First that one on which I found Barbara Guest alone and blurted out that I had the audacity to wish to make her my wife; and then heard, before I had well — or badly — told my tale, the wheels of grandmamma's chair outside.

"Hush!" the girl said, her face turned from me. "Hush, Mr. Herapath. You don't know me, indeed. You have seen so little of me. Please say

nothing more about it. You are completely under a delusion."

"It is no delusion that I love you, Barbara!" I cried.

"It is, it is," she repeated, freeing her hand. "There, if you will not take an answer — come — come at three to-morrow. But mind, I promise you nothing — I promise you nothing," she added feverishly, and fled from the room, leaving me to talk to grandmamma as best, and escape as quickly as, I might.

I longed for a great fire that evening, and failing one, tired myself by tramping unknown streets of the East-end, striving to teach myself that any trouble to-morrow might bring was but a shadow, a sentiment, a thing not to be mentioned in the same breath with the want and toil of which I caught glimpses up each street and lane that opened to right and left. In the main, of course, I failed: but the effort did me good, sending me home tired out, to sleep as soundly as if I were going to be hanged next day, and not — which is a very different thing — to be put upon my trial.

"I will tell Miss Guest you are here, sir," the man said. I looked at all the little things in the room which I had come to know well — her work-

basket, the music upon the piano, the table-easel, her photograph — and wondered if I were to see them no more, or if they were to become a part of my every-day life. Then I heard her come in, and turned quickly, feeling that I should learn my fate from her greeting.

"Bab!" The word was rung from me perforce. And then we stood and looked at one another, she with a strange pride and defiance in her eyes, though her cheek was dark with blushes, and I with wonder and perplexity in mine, — wonder and perplexity that quickly grew into a conviction, a certainty that the girl standing before me in the short-skirted brown dress with tangled hair and loose neck-ribbon was the Bab I had known in Norway; and yet that the eyes — I could not mistake them now, no matter what unaccustomed look they might wear — were Barbara Guest's!

"Miss Guest — Barbara," I stammered, grappling with the truth, "why have you played this trick upon me?"

"It is Miss Guest and Barbara now," she cried, with a mocking courtesy. "Do you remember, Mr. Herapath, when it was Bab? When you treated me as a kind of toy, and a plaything, with which you might be as intimate as you liked; and

hurt my feelings — yes, it is weak to confess it, I know — day by day, and hour by hour?"

"But surely, that is forgiven now?" I said, dazed by an attack so sudden and so bitter. "It is atonement enough that I am at your feet now, Barbara!"

"You are not," she retorted hotly. "Don't say you have offered love to me, who am the same with the child you teased at Breistolen. You have fallen in love with my fine clothes, and my pearls and my maid's work, not with me. You have fancied the girl you saw other men make much of. But you have not loved the woman who might have prized that which Miss Guest has never learned to value."

"How old are you?" I said, hoarsely.

"Nineteen!" she snapped out. And then for a moment we were both silent.

"I begin to understand now," I answered slowly as soon as I could conquer something in my throat. "Long ago when I hardly knew you, I hurt your woman's pride; and since that you have plotted ——"

"No, you have tricked yourself!"

"And schemed to bring me to your feet that you might have the pleasure of trampling on me.

Miss Guest, your triumph is complete, more complete than you are able to understand. I loved you this morning above all the world — as my own life — as every hope I had. See, I tell you this that you may have a moment's keener pleasure when I am gone."

"Don't! Don't!" she cried, throwing herself into a chair and covering her face.

"You have won a man's heart and cast it aside to gratify an old pique. You may rest content now, for there is nothing wanting to your vengeance. You have given me as much pain as a woman, the vainest and the most heartless, can give a man. Good-by."

And with that I was leaving her, fighting my own pain and passion, so that the little hands she raised as though they would ward off my words were nothing to me. I felt a savage delight in seeing that I could hurt her, which deadened my own grief. The victory was not all with her lying there sobbing. Only where was my hat? Let me get my hat and go. Let me escape from this room wherein every trifle upon which my eye rested awoke some memory that was a pang. Let me get away, and have done with it all.

Where was the hat? I had brought it up. I

could not go without it. It must be under her chair, by all that was unlucky, for it was nowhere else. I could not stand and wait, and so I had to go up to her, with cold words of apology upon my lips, and being close to her and seeing on her wrist, half hidden by fallen hair, the scar she had brought home from Norway, I don't know how it was that I fell on my knees by her and cried:

"Oh, Bab, I loved you so! Let us part friends."

For a moment, silence. Then she whispered, her hand in mine, "Why did you not say Bab to begin? I only told you that Miss Guest had not learned to value your love."

"And Bab?" I murmured, my brain in a whirl.

"Learned long ago, poor girl!"

And the fair, tear-stained face of my tyrant looked into mine for a moment, and then came quite naturally to its resting place.

"Now," she said, when I was leaving, "you may have your hat, sir."

"I believe," I replied, "that you sat upon this chair on purpose."

And Bab blushed. I believe she did.

# A Strange Invitation

I HAVE friends who tell me that they seldom walk the streets of London without wondering what is passing behind the house-fronts; without picturing a comedy here, a love-scene there, and behind the dingy cane blinds a something ill-defined, a something odd and *bizarre*. They experience — if you believe them — a sense of loneliness out in the street, an impatience of the sameness of all these many houses, their dull bricks and discreet windows, and a longing that some one would step out and ask them to enter and see the play.

Well, I have never felt any of these things; but as I was passing through Fitzhardinge Square about half-past ten o'clock one evening in last July, after dining, if I remember rightly, in Baker Street, something happened to me which I fancy may be of interest to such people.

## A Strange Invitation

I was passing through the square from north to south, and to avoid a small crowd, which some reception had drawn together, I left the pavement and struck across the road to the path round the oval garden; which, by the way, contains a few of the finest trees in London. This part was in deep shadow, so that when I presently emerged from it and recrossed the road to the pavement near the top of Fitzhardinge Street, I had an advantage over any persons on the pavement. They were under the lamps, while I, coming from beneath the trees, was almost invisible.

The door of the house immediately in front of me as I crossed was open, and an elderly manservant out of livery was standing at it, looking up and down the pavement by turns. It was his air of furtive anxiety that drew my attention to him. He was not like a man looking for a cab, or waiting for his sweetheart; and I had my eye upon him as I stepped upon the pavement before him. But my surprise was great when he uttered a low exclamation of dismay at sight of me and made as if he would escape; while his face, in the full glare of the light, grew so pale and terror-stricken that he might before have been completely at his ease. I was astonished and instinctively stood still re-

turning his gaze; for perhaps twenty seconds we remained so, he speechless, and his hands fallen by his side. Then, before I could move on, as I was in the act of doing, he cried, "Oh! Mr. George! Oh! Mr. George!" in a tone that rang out in the stillness rather as a wail than an ordinary cry.

My name, my surname I mean, is George. For a moment I took the address to myself, forgetting that the man was a stranger, and my heart began to beat more quickly with fear of what might have happened. "What is it?" I exclaimed. "What is it?" and I shook back from the lower part of my face the silk muffler I was wearing. The evening was close, but I had been suffering from a sore throat.

He came nearer and peered more closely at me, and I dismissed my fear; for I thought that I could see the discovery of his mistake dawning upon him. His pallid face, on which the pallor was the more noticeable as his plump features were those of a man with whom the world as a rule went well, regained some of its lost color, and a sigh of relief passed his lips. But this feeling was only momentary. The joy of escape from whatever blow he had thought imminent gave place at once to his

previous state of miserable expectancy of something or other.

"You took me for another person," I said, preparing to pass on. At that moment I could have sworn — I would have given one hundred to one twice over — that he was going to say Yes. To my intense astonishment, he did not. With a very visible effort he said, "No!"

"Eh! What?" I exclaimed. I had taken a step or two.

"No, sir."

"Then what is it?" I said. "What do you want, my good fellow?"

Watching his shuffling, indeterminate manner, I wondered if he were sane. His next answer reassured me on that point. There was an almost desperate deliberation about its manner. "My master wishes to see you, sir, if you will kindly walk in for five minutes," was what he said.

I should have replied, "Who is your master?" if I had been wise; or cried, "Nonsense!" and gone my way. But the mind when it is spurred by a sudden emergency often overruns the more obvious course to adopt a worse. It was possible that one of my intimates had taken the house, and said in his butler's presence that he wished to see

me. Thinking of that I answered, "Are you sure of this? Have you not made a mistake, my man?"

With an obstinate sullenness that was new in him he said, No, he had not. Would I please to walk in? He stepped briskly forward as he spoke, and induced me by a kind of gentle urgency to enter the house, taking from me with the ease of a trained servant my hat, coat, and muffler. Finding himself in the course of his duties he gained more composure; while I, being thus treated, lost my sense of the strangeness of the proceeding, and only awoke to a full consciousness of my position when he had softly shut the door behind us and was in the act of putting up the chain.

Then I confess I looked round a little alarmed at my precipitancy. But I found the hall spacious, lofty, and dark-panelled, the ordinary hall of an old London house. The big fireplace was filled with plants in flower. There were rugs on the floor and a number of chairs with painted crests on the backs, and in a corner was an old sedan chair, its poles upright against the wall.

No other servants were visible, it is true. But apart from this all was in order, all was quiet, and any idea of violence was manifestly absurd.

At the same time the affair seemed of the strangest. Why should the butler in charge of a well-arranged and handsome house — the house of an ordinary wealthy gentleman — why should he loiter about the open doorway as if anxious to feel the presence of his kind? Why should he show such nervous excitement and terror as I had witnessed? Why should he introduce a stranger?

I had reached this point when he led the way upstairs. The staircase was wide, the steps were low and broad. On either side at the head of the flight stood a beautiful Venus of white Parian marble. They were not common reproductions, and I paused. I could see beyond them a Hercules and a Meleager of bronze, and delicately tinted draperies and ottomans that under the light of a silver hanging-lamp — a gem from Malta — changed a mere lobby to a fairies' nook. The sight filled me with a certain suspicion; which was dispelled, however, when my hand rested for an instant upon the reddish pedestal that supported one of the statues. The cold touch of the marble was enough for me. The pillars were not of composite; of which they certainly would have consisted in a gaming-house, or worse.

Three steps carried me across the lobby to a

curtained doorway by which the servant was waiting. I saw that the "shakes" were upon him again. His impatience was so ill-concealed that I was not surprised — though I was taken aback — when he dropped the mask altogether, and as I passed him — it being now too late for me to retreat undiscovered, if the room were occupied — laid a trembling hand upon my arm and thrust his face close to mine. "Ask how he is! Say anything," he whispered trembling, "no matter what, sir! Only, for the love of heaven, stay five minutes!"

He gave me a gentle push forward as he spoke — pleasant all this! — and announced in a loud, quavering voice, "Mr. George!" — which was true enough. I found myself walking round a screen at the same time that something in the room, a long, dimly-lighted room, fell with a brisk, rattling sound, and there was the scuffling noise of a person, still hidden from me by the screen, rising to his feet in haste.

Next moment I was face to face with two men. One, a handsome, elderly gentleman, who wore gray moustaches and would have seemed in place at a service club, was still in his chair regarding me with a perfectly calm, unmoved face, as if my

entrance at that hour were the commonest incident of his life. The other had risen and stood looking at me askance. He was five-and-twenty years younger than his companion and as good-looking in a different way. But now his face was white and drawn, distorted by the same expression of terror — ay, and a darker and fiercer terror than that which I had already seen upon the servant's features; it was the face of one in a desperate strait. He looked as a man looks who has put all he has in the world upon an outsider — and done it twice. In that quiet drawing-room by the side of his placid companion, with nothing whatever in their surroundings to account for his emotion, his panic-stricken face shocked me inexpressibly.

They were in evening dress; and between them was a chess-table, its men in disorder: almost touching this was another small table bearing a tray of Apollinaris water and spirits. On this the young man was resting one hand as if but for its support he would have fallen.

To add one more fact, I had never seen either of them in my life.

Or wait; could that be true? If so, it must be indeed a nightmare I was suffering. For the elder

man broke the silence by addressing me in a quiet ordinary tone that exactly matched his face. "Sit down, George," he said, "don't stand there. I did not expect you this evening." He held out his hand, without rising from his chair, and I advanced and shook it in silence. "I thought you were in Liverpool. How are you?" he continued.

"Very well, I thank you," I muttered mechanically.

"Not very well, I should say," he retorted. "You are as hoarse as a raven. You have a bad cold at best. It is nothing worse, my boy, is it?" with anxiety.

"No, a throat cough; nothing else," I murmured, resigning myself to this astonishing reception — this evident concern for my welfare on the part of a man whom I had never seen in my life.

"That is well!" he answered cheerily. Not only did my presence cause him no surprise. It gave him, without doubt, actual pleasure!

It was otherwise with his companion; grimly and painfully so indeed. He had made no advances to me, spoken no word, scarcely altered his position. His eyes he had never taken from me. Yet in him there was a change. He had discovered, exactly as had the butler before him, his

mistake. The sickly terror was gone from his face, and a half-frightened malevolence not much more pleasant to witness had taken its place. Why this did not break out in any active form was part of the general mystery given to me to solve. I could only surmise from glances which he later cast from time to time towards the door, and from the occasional faint creaking of a board in that direction, that his self-restraint had to do with my friend the butler. The inconsequences of dream-land ran through it all: why the elder man remained in error; why the younger with that passion on his face was tongue-tied; why the great house was so still; why the servant should have mixed me up with this business at all — these were questions as unanswerable, one as the other.

And the fog in my mind grew denser when the old gentleman turned from me as if my presence were a usual thing, and rapped the table before him impatiently. "Now, Gerald!" cried he in sharp tones, "have you put those pieces back? Good heavens! I am glad that I have not nerves like yours! Don't remember the squares, boy? Here, give them to me!" With a hasty gesture of his hand, something like a mesmeric pass over the board, he set down the half-dozen pieces with

a rapid tap! tap! tap! which made it abundantly clear that he, at any rate, had no doubt of their former positions.

"You will not mind sitting by until we have finished the game?" he continued, speaking to me, and in a voice I fancied more genial than that which he had used to Gerald. "You are anxious to talk to me about your letter, George?" he went on when I did not answer. "The fact is that I have not read the inclosure. Barnes, as usual, read the outer letter to me, in which you said the matter was private and of grave importance; and I intended to go to Laura to-morrow, as you suggested, and get her to read the news to me. Now you have returned so soon, I am glad that I did not trouble her."

"Just so, sir," I said, listening with all my ears; and wondering.

"Well, I hope there is nothing very bad the matter, my boy?" he replied. "However — Gerald! it is your move! — ten minutes more of such play as your brother's, and I shall be at your service."

Gerald made a hurried move. The piece rattled upon the board as if he had been playing the castanets. His father made him take it back. I

sat watching the two in wonder and silence. What did it all mean? Why should Barnes — doubtless behind the screen listening — read the outer letter? Why must Laura be employed to read the inner? Why could not this cultivated and refined gentleman before me read his — Ah! That much was disclosed to me. A mere turn of the hand did it. He had made another of those passes over the board, and I learned from it what an ordinary examination would not have detected. He, the old soldier with the placid face and light-blue eyes, was blind! Quite blind!

I began to see more clearly now, and from this moment I took up, at any rate in my own mind, a different position. Possibly the servant who had impelled me into the middle of this had had his own good reasons for doing so, as I now began to discern. But with a clue to the labyrinth in my hand I could no longer move passively at any other's impulse. I must act for myself. For a while I sat still and made no sign. My suspicions were presently confirmed. The elder man more than once scolded his opponent for playing slowly; in one of these intervals he took from an inside pocket of his dress waistcoat a small packet.

"You had better take your letter, George," he

said. "If there are, as you mentioned, originals in it, they will be more safe with you than with me. You can tell me all about it, *viva voce*, now you are here. Gerald will leave us alone presently."

He held the papers towards me. To take them would be to take an active part in the imposture, and I hesitated, my own hand half outstretched. But my eyes fell at the critical instant upon Master Gerald's face, and my scruples took themselves off. He was eyeing the packet with an intense greed, and a trembling longing — a very itching of the fingers and toes, to fall upon the prey — that put an end to my doubts. I rose and took the papers. With a quiet, but I think significant, look in his direction, I placed them in the breast-pocket of my evening coat. I had no safer receptacle about me, or into that they would have gone.

"Very well, sir," I said. "There is no particular hurry. I think the matter will keep, as things now are, until to-morrow."

"To be sure. You ought not to be out with such a cold at night, my boy," he answered. "You will find a decanter of the Scotch whiskey you gave me last Christmas on the tray. Will you

have some hot water and a lemon, George? The servants are all at the theatre — Gerald begged a holiday for them — but Barnes will get you the things in a minute."

"Thank you; I won't trouble him. I will take some with cold water," I replied, thinking I should gain in this way what I wanted — time to think: five minutes to myself, while they played.

But I was out in my reckoning. "I will have mine now too," he said. "Will you mix it, Gerald?"

Gerald jumped up to do it with tolerable alacrity. I sat still, preferring to help myself, when he should have attended to his father — if his father it was. I felt more easy now that I had those papers in my pocket. The more I thought of it, the more certain I became that they were the object aimed at by whatever devilry was on foot; and that possession of them gave me the whip-hand. My young gentleman might snarl and show his teeth, but the prize had escaped him.

Perhaps I was a little too confident: a little too contemptuous of my opponent; a little too proud of the firmness with which I had taken at one and the same time the responsibility and the post of vantage. A creak of the board behind the screen

roused me from my thoughts. It fell upon my ear trumpet-tongued: a sudden note of warning. I glanced up with a start, and a conviction that I was being caught napping, and looked instinctively towards the young man. He was busy at the tray, his back to me. Relieved of my fear of I I did not know what — perhaps a desperate attack upon my pocket, I was removing my eyes, when, in doing so, I caught sight of his reflection in a small mirror beyond him. Ah!

What was he busy about? Nothing. Absolutely nothing, at the moment. He was standing motionless — I could fancy him breathless also — a strange listening expression on his face; which seemed to me to have faded to a grayish tinge. His left hand was clasping a half-filled tumbler: the other was at his waistcoat pocket. So he stood during perhaps a second or two, a small lamp upon the tray before him illumining his handsome figure; and then his eyes, glancing up, met the reflection of mine in the mirror. Swiftly as the thought itself could pass from brain to limb, the hand which had been resting in the pocket flashed with a clatter among the glasses; and turning almost as quickly, he brought one of the latter to the chess-table, and set it down unsteadily.

What had I seen! Nothing; actually nothing. Just what Gerald had been doing. Yet my heart was going as many strokes to the minute as a losing crew. I rose abruptly.

"Wait a moment, sir," I said, as the elder man laid his hand upon the glass, "I don't think that Gerald has mixed this quite as you like it."

He had already lifted it to his lips. I looked from him to Gerald. That young gentleman's color, though he faced me hardily, shifted more than once, and he seemed to be swallowing a succession of over-sized fives-balls; but his eyes met mine in a vicious kind of smile that was not without its gleam of triumph. I was persuaded that all was right even before his father said so.

"Perhaps you have mixed for me, Gerald?" I suggested pleasantly.

"No!" he answered in sullen defiance. He filled a glass with something — perhaps it was water — and drank it, his back towards me. He had not spoken so much as a single word to me before.

The blind man's ear recognized the tone now. "I wish you boys would agree better," he said wearily. "Gerald, go to bed. I would as soon play chess with an idiot from Earlswood. Generally

you can play the game if you are good for nothing else; but since your brother came in, you have not made a move which any one not an imbecile would make. Go to bed, boy! Go to bed!"

I had stepped to the table while he was speaking. One of the glasses was full. I lifted it with seeming unconcern to my nose. There was whiskey in it as well as water. Then *had* Gerald mixed for me? At any rate, I put the tumbler aside, and helped myself afresh. When I set the glass down empty, my mind was made up.

"Gerald does not seem inclined to move, sir, so I will," I said quietly. "I will call in the morning and discuss that matter, if it will suit you. But to-night I feel inclined to get to bed early."

"Quite right, my boy. I would ask you to take a bed here instead of turning out, but I suppose that Laura will be expecting you. Come in any time to-morrow morning. Shall Barnes call a cab for you?"

"I think I will walk," I answered, shaking the proffered hand. "By the way, sir," I added, "have you heard who is the new Home Secretary?"

"Yes, Henry Matthews," he replied. "Gerald told me. He had heard it at the Club."

"It is to be hoped that he will have no woman-

ish scruples about capital punishment," I said, as if I were incidentally considering the appointment. And with that last shot at Mr. Gerald — he turned green, I thought, a color which does not go well with a black moustache — I walked out of the room, so peaceful, so cosy, so softly lighted, as it looked, I remember; and downstairs. I hoped that I had paralyzed the young fellow, and might leave the house without molestation.

But as I gained the foot of the stairs he tapped me on the shoulder. I saw then, looking at him, that I had mistaken my man. Every trace of the sullen defiance which had marked his manner throughout the interview upstairs was gone. His face was still pale, but it wore a gentle smile as we confronted one another under the hall lamp. "I have not the pleasure of knowing you, but let me thank you for your help," he said, in a low voice, yet with a kind of frank spontaneity. "Barnes's idea of bringing you in was a splendid one, and I am immensely obliged to you."

"Don't mention it," I answered stiffly, proceeding with my preparations for going out, as if he were not there; although I must confess that this complete change in him exercised my mind no little.

"I feel so sure that we may rely upon your discretion," he went on, ignoring my tone, "that I need say nothing about that. Of course we owe you an explanation, but as your cold is really yours and not my brother's, you will not mind if I read you the riddle to-morrow instead of keeping you from your bed to-night?"

"It will do equally well — indeed better," I said, putting on my overcoat, and buttoning it carefully across my chest, while I affected to be looking with curiosity at the sedan chair.

He pointed lightly to the place where the packet lay. "You are forgetting the papers," he reminded me. His tone almost compelled the answer, "To be sure."

But I had pretty well made up my mind, and I answered instead, "Not at all. They are quite safe, thank you."

"But you don't — I beg your pardon —" he said, opening his eyes very wide, as if some new light were beginning to shine upon his mind and he could scarcely believe its revelations. "You don't really mean that you are going to take those papers away with you?"

"Certainly."

"My dear sir!" he remonstrated earnestly.

"This is preposterous. Pray forgive me the reminder, but those papers, as my father gave you to understand, are private papers, which he supposed himself to be handing to my brother, George."

"Just so!" was all I said. And I took a step towards the door.

"You really mean to take them?" he asked seriously.

"I do; unless you can satisfactorily explain the part I have played this evening. And also make it clear to me that you have a right to the possession of the papers."

"Confound it! If I must do so to-night, I must!" he said reluctantly. "I trust to your honor, sir, to keep the explanation secret." I bowed, and he resumed. "My elder brother and I are in business together. Lately we have had losses which have crippled us so severely that we decided to disclose them to Sir Charles and ask his help. George did so yesterday by letter, giving certain notes of our liabilities. You ask why he did not make such a statement by word of mouth? Because he had to go to Liverpool at a moment's notice to make a last effort to arrange the matter. And as for

me," with a curious grimace, "my father would as soon discuss business with his dog! Sooner!"

"Well?" I said. He had paused, and was absently flicking the blossoms off the geraniums in the fireplace with his pocket-handkerchief, looking moodily at his work the while. I cannot remember noticing the handkerchief, yet I seem to be able to see it now. It had a red border, and was heavily scented with white rose. "Well?"

"Well," he continued, with a visible effort, "my father has been ailing lately, and this morning his usual doctor made him see Bristowe. He is an authority on heart-disease, as you doubtless know; and his opinion is," he added in a lower voice and with some emotion, "that even a slight shock may prove fatal."

I began to feel hot and uncomfortable. What was I to think? The packet was becoming as lead in my pocket.

"Of course," he resumed more briskly, "that threw our difficulties into the shade at once; and my first impulse was to get these papers from him. Don't you see that? All day I have been trying in vain to effect it. I took Barnes, who is an old servant, partially into my confidence, but we could think of no plan. My father, like

many people who have lost their sight, is jealous, and I was at my wits' end, when Barnes brought you up. Your likeness," he added in a parenthesis, looking at me reflectively, "to George put the idea into his head, I fancy? Yes, it must have been so. When I heard you announced, for a moment I thought you were George."

"And you called up a look of the warmest welcome," I put in dryly.

He colored, but answered almost immediately, "I was afraid that he would assume that the governor had read his letter, and blurt out something about it. Good Lord! if you knew the funk in which I have been all the evening lest my father should ask either of us to read the letter!" and he gathered up his handkerchief with a sigh of relief, and wiped his forehead.

"I could see it very plainly," I answered, going slowly in my mind over what he had told me. If the truth must be confessed, I was in no slight quandary what I should do, or what I should believe. Was this really the key to it all? Dared I doubt it, or that that which I had constructed was a mare's nest,—the mere framework of a mare's nest. For the life of me I could not tell!

"Well?" he said presently, looking up with an offended air. "Is there anything else I can explain? or will you have the kindness to return my property to me now?"

"There is one thing about which I should like to ask a question," I said.

"Ask on," he replied; and I wondered whether there was not a little too much of bravado in the tone of sufferance he assumed.

"Why do you carry —" I went on, raising my eyes to his, and pausing on the word an instant — "that little medicament — you know what I mean — in your waistcoat pocket, my friend?"

He perceptibly flinched. "I don't quite — quite understand," he began to stammer. Then he changed his tone and went on rapidly, "No! I will be frank with you, Mr. — Mr. —"

"George," I said, calmly.

"Ah, indeed?" a trifle surprised, "Mr. George! Well, it is something Bristowe gave me this morning to be administered to my father — without his knowledge, if possible — whenever he grows excited. I did not think that you had seen it."

Nor had I. I had only inferred its presence. But having inferred rightly once, I was inclined to trust my inference farther. Moreover while

he gave this explanation, his breath came and went so quickly that my former suspicions returned. I was ready for him when he said, "Now I will trouble you, if you please, for those papers!" and held out his hand.

"I cannot give them to you," I replied, point blank.

"You cannot give them to me now?" he repeated.

"No. Moreover the packet is sealed. I do not see, on second thoughts, what harm I can do you — now that it is out of your father's hands — by keeping it until to-morrow, when I will return it to your brother, from whom it came."

"He will not be in London," he answered doggedly. He stepped between me and the door with looks which I did not like. At the same time I felt that some allowance must be made for a man treated in this way.

"I am sorry," I said, "but I cannot do what you ask. I will do this, however. If you think the delay of importance, and will give me your brother's address in Liverpool, I will undertake to post the letters to him at once."

He considered the offer, eyeing me the while with the same disfavor which he had exhibited in

the drawing-room. At last he said slowly, "If you will do that?"

"I will," I repeated. "I will do it immediately."

He gave me the direction — "George Ritherdon, at the London and North-Western Hotel, Liverpool," and in return I gave him my own name and address. Then I parted from him, with a civil good-night on either side — and little liking I fancy — the clocks striking midnight, and the servants coming in as I passed out into the cool darkness of the square.

Late as it was, I went straight to my club, determined that as I had assumed the responsibility there should be no laches on my part. There I placed the packet, together with a short note explaining how it came into my possession, in an outer envelope, and dropped the whole duly directed and stamped into the nearest pillar box. I could not register it at that hour, and rather than wait until next morning, I omitted the precaution, merely requesting Mr. Ritherdon to acknowledge its receipt.

Well, some days passed during which it may be imagined that I thought no little about my odd experience. It was the story of the Lady and the

Tiger over again. I had the choice of two alternatives at least. I might either believe the young fellow's story, which certainly had the merit of explaining in a fairly probable manner an occurrence of so odd a character as not to lend itself freely to explanation. Or I might disbelieve his story, plausible in its very strangeness as it was, in favor of my own vague suspicions. Which was I to do?

Well, I set out by preferring the former alternative. This notwithstanding that I had to some extent committed myself against it by withholding the papers. But with each day that passed without bringing me an answer from Liverpool, I leaned more and more to the other side. I began to pin my faith to the tiger, adding each morning a point to the odds in the animal's favor. So it went on until ten days had passed.

Then a little out of curiosity, but more, I gravely declare, because I thought it the right thing to do, I resolved to seek out George Ritherdon. I had no difficulty in learning where he might be found. I turned up the firm of Ritherdon Brothers (George and Gerald), cotton-spinners and India merchants, in the first directory I consulted. And about noon the next day I called at

their place of business, and sent in my card to the senior partner. I waited five minutes — curiously scanned by the porter, who no doubt saw a likeness between me and his employer — and then I was admitted to the latter's room.

He was a tall man with a fair beard, not one whit like Gerald, and yet tolerably good-looking; if I say more I shall seem to be describing myself. I fancied him to be balder about the temples, however, and grayer and more careworn than the man I am in the habit of seeing in my shaving-glass. His eyes, too, had a hard look, and he seemed in ill-health. All these things I took in later. At the time I only noticed his clothes. "So the old gentleman is dead," I thought, "and the young one's tale is true after all!" George Ritherdon was in deep mourning.

"I wrote to you," I began, taking the seat to which he pointed, "about a fortnight ago."

He looked at my card, which he held in his hand. "I think not," he said slowly.

"Yes," I repeated. "You were then at the London and North-Western Hotel, at Liverpool."

He was stepping to his writing-table, but he stopped abruptly. "I was in Liverpool," he answered in a different tone, "but I was not at

that hotel. You are thinking of my brother, are you not?"

"No," I said, "it was your brother who told me you were there."

"Perhaps you had better explain what was the subject of your letter," he suggested, speaking in the weary tone of one returning to a painful matter. "I have been through a great trouble lately, and this may well have been overlooked."

I said I would, and as briefly as possible I told the main facts of my strange visit in Fitzhardinge Square. He was much moved, walking up and down the room as he listened, and giving vent to exclamations from time to time, until I came to the arrangement I had finally made with his brother. Then he raised his hand as one might do in pain.

"Enough!" he said abruptly. "Barnes told me a rambling tale of some stranger. I understand it all now."

"So do I, I think!" I replied dryly. "Your brother went to Liverpool, and received the papers in your name?"

He murmured what I took for "Yes." But he did not utter a single word of acknowledgement to me, or of reprobation of his brother's deceit. I

thought some such word should have been spoken; and I let my feelings carry me away. "Let me tell you," I said warmly, "that your brother is a—"

"Hush!" he said, holding up his hand again. "He is dead."

"Dead!" I repeated, shocked and amazed.

"Have you not read of it in the papers? It is in all the papers," he said wearily. "He committed suicide — God forgive me for it! — at Liverpool, at the hotel you have mentioned, and the day after you saw him."

And so it was. He had committed some serious forgery — he had always been wild, though his father, slow to see it, had only lately closed his purse to him — and the forged signatures had come into his brother's power. He had cheated his brother before. There had long been bad blood between them, the one being as cold, business-like, and masterful as the other was idle and jealous.

"I told him," the elder said to me, shading his eyes with his hand, "that I should let him be prosecuted — that I would not protect or shelter him. The threat nearly drove him mad; and while it was hanging over him, I wrote to disclose the matter to Sir Charles. Gerald thought his last

chance lay in recovering this letter unread. The proofs against him destroyed, he might laugh at me. His first attempts failed; and then he planned with Barnes's cognizance to get possession of the packet by drugging my father's whiskey. Barnes's courage deserted him; he called you in, and — and you know the rest."

"But," I said softly, "your brother did get the letter — at Liverpool."

George Ritherdon groaned. "Yes," he said, "he did. But the proofs were not enclosed. After writing the outside letter I changed my mind, and withheld them, explaining my reasons within. He found his plot laid in vain; and it was under the shock of this disappointment — the packet lay before him re-sealed and directed to me — that he — that he did it. Poor Gerald!"

"Poor Gerald!" I said. What else remained to be said?

It may be a survival of superstition, yet when I dine in Baker Street now, I take some care to go home by any other route than that through Fitzhardinge Square.

# The Invisible Portraits.

ON a certain morning in last June I was stooping to fasten a shoe-lace, having taken advantage for the purpose of the step of a corner house in St. James's Square, when a man passing behind me stopped.

"Well!" said he, aloud, after a short pause during which I wondered — I could not see him — what he was doing, "the meanness of these rich folk is disgusting! Not a coat of paint for a twelvemonth! I should be ashamed to own a house and leave it like that!"

The man was a stranger to me, and his words seemed as uncalled for as they were ill-natured. But being thus challenged I looked at the house. It was a great stone mansion with a balustrade atop, with many windows and a long stretch of area railings. And certainly it was shabby. I turned from it to the critic. He was shabby too — a little red-nosed man wearing a bad hat. "It is

just possible," I suggested, "that the owner may be a poor man and unable to keep it in order."

"Ugh! What has that to do with it?" my new friend answered contemptuously. "He ought to think of the public."

"And your hat?" I asked with winning politeness. "It strikes me, an unprejudiced observer, as a bad hat. Why do you not get a new one?"

"Cannot afford it!" he snapped out, his dull eyes sparkling with rage.

"Cannot afford it? But, my good man, you ought to think of the public."

"You tom-cat! What have you to do with my hat? Smother you!" was his kindly answer; and he went on his way muttering things uncomplimentary.

I was about to go mine, and was first falling back to gain a better view of the house in question, when a chuckle close to me betrayed the presence of a listener, a thin, gray-haired man, who, hidden by a pillar of the porch, must have heard our discussion. His hands were engaged with a white tablecloth, from which he had been shaking the crumbs. He had the air of an upper servant of the best class. As our eyes met he spoke.

"Neatly put, sir, if I may take the liberty of

saying so," he observed with a quiet dignity it was a pleasure to witness, " and we are very much obliged to you. The man was a snob, sir."

" I am afraid he was," I answered; " and a fool too."

" And a fool, sir. Answer a fool after his folly. You did that, and he was nowhere; nowhere at all, except in the swearing line. Now might I ask," he continued, " if you are an American, sir?"

" No, I am not," I answered; " but I have spent some time in the States."

I could have fancied that he sighed.

" I thought — but never mind, sir," he began. " I was wrong. It is curious how very much alike gentlemen, that are real gentlemen, speak. Now, I dare swear, sir, that you have a taste for pictures."

I was inclined to humor the old fellow's mood.

" I like a good picture, I admit," I said.

" Then perhaps you would not be offended if I asked you to step inside and look at one or two," he suggested timidly. " I would not take a liberty, sir, but there are some Van Dycks and a Rubens in the dining-room that cost a mint of money in their day, I have heard; and there is no one else in the house but my wife and myself."

It was a strange invitation, strangely brought about. But I saw no reason for myself why I should not accept it, and I followed him into the hall. It was spacious, but sparely furnished. The matted floor had a cold look, and so had the gaunt stand which seemed to be a fixture, and boasted but one umbrella, one sunshade, and one dog-whip. As I passed a half-open door I caught a glimpse of a small room prettily furnished, with dainty prints and water-colors on the walls. But these were of a common order. A dozen replicas of each and all might be seen in a walk through Bond Street. Even this oasis of taste and comfort told the same story as had the bare hall and dreary exterior, and laid as it were a finger on one's heart. I trod softly as I followed my guide along the strip of matting towards the rear of the house.

He opened a door at the inner end of the hall, and led me into a large and lofty room, built out from the back, as a state dining-room or ball-room. At present it rather resembled the latter, for it was without furniture. "Now," said the old man, turning and respectfully touching my sleeve to gain my attention, "now you will not consider your labor lost in coming to see that, sir. It is a por-

trait of the second Lord Wetherby by Sir Anthony Van Dyck, and is judged to be one of the finest specimens of his style in existence."

I was lost in astonishment; amazed, almost appalled. My companion stood by my side, his face wearing a placid smile of satisfaction, his hand pointing slightly upwards to the blank wall before us. The blank wall! Of any picture, there or elsewhere in the room, there was no sign. I turned to him and then from him, and I felt very sick at heart. The poor old fellow was — must be — mad. I gazed blankly at the blank wall. "By Van Dyck?" I repeated mechanically.

"Yes, sir, by Van Dyck?" he replied, in the most matter-of-fact tone imaginable. "So, too, is this one;" he moved as he spoke a few feet to his left. "The second peer's first wife in the costume of a lady-in-waiting. This portrait and the last are in as good a state of preservation as on the day they were painted."

Oh, certainly mad! And yet so graphic was his manner, so crisp and realistic were his words, that I rubbed my eyes; and looked and looked again, and almost fancied that Lord Walter and Anne, his wife, grew into shape before me on the wall. Almost, but not quite; and it was with a

heart full of wondering pity that I accompanied the old man, in whose manner there was no trace of wildness or excitement, round the walls; visiting in turn the Cuyp which my lord bought in Holland, the Rubens, the four Lawrences, and the Philips —a very Barmecide feast of art. I could not doubt that the old man saw the pictures. But I saw only bare walls.

"Now I think you have seen them, family portraits and all," he concluded, as we came to the doorway again; stating the fact, which was no fact, with complacent pride. "They are fine pictures, sir. They, at least, are left, although the house is not what it was."

"Very fine pictures," I remarked. I was minded to learn if he were sane on other points. "Lord Wetherby," I said, "I should suppose that he is not in London?"

"I do not know sir, one way or the other," the servant answered with a new air of reserve. "This is not his lordship's house. Mrs. Wigram, my late lord's daughter-in-law, lives here."

"But this is the Wetherbys' town house," I persisted. I knew so much.

"It was my late lord's house. At his son's marriage it was settled upon Mrs. Wigram,

and little enough besides, God knows!" he exclaimed querulously. "It was Mr. Alfred's wish that some land should be settled upon his wife, but there was none out of the entail, and my lord, who did not like the match, though he lived to be fond enough of the mistress afterwards, said, 'Settle the house in town!' in a bitter kind of joke like. So the house was settled, and five hundred pounds a year. Mr. Alfred died abroad, as you may know, sir, and my lord was not long in following him.

He was closing the shutters of one window after another as he spoke. The room had sunk into deep gloom. I could imagine now that the pictures were really where he fancied them. "And Lord Wetherby, the late peer," I asked, after a pause, "did he leave his daughter-in-law nothing?"

"My lord died suddenly, leaving no will," he replied sadly. "That is how it all is. And the present peer, who was only a second cousin — well, I say nothing about him." A reticence which was well calculated to consign his lordship to the lowest deep.

"He did not help?" I asked.

"Devil a bit, begging your pardon, sir. But there! it is not my place to talk of these things.

I doubt I have wearied you with talk about the family. It is not my way," he added, as if wondering at himself, "only something in what you said seemed to touch a chord like."

By this time we were outside the room, standing at the inner end of the hall, while he fumbled with the lock of the door. Short passages ending in swing doors ran out right and left from this point, and through one of these a tidy, middle-aged woman wearing an apron suddenly emerged. At sight of me she looked greatly astonished. "I have been showing the gentleman the pictures," said my guide, who was still occupied with the door.

A quick flash of pain altered and hardened the woman's face. "I have been very much interested, madam," I said softly.

Her gaze left me to dwell upon the old man with infinite affection. "John had no right to bring you in, sir," she said primly. "I have never known him do such a thing before, and — Lord a mercy! there is the mistress's knock. Go, John, and let her in; and this gentleman," with an inquisitive look at me, "will not mind stepping a bit aside, while her ladyship goes upstairs."

"Certainly not," I answered. I hastened to

draw back into one of the side passages, into the darkest corner of it, and there stood leaning against the cool panels, my hat in my hand.

In the short pause which ensued before John opened the door she whispered to me, "You have not told him, sir?"

"About the pictures?"

"Yes, sir. He is blind, you see."

"Blind?" I exclaimed.

"Yes, sir, this year and more; and when the pictures were taken away — by the present earl — that he had known all his life, and been so proud to show to people just the same as if they had been his own, why, it seemed a shame to tell him. I have never had the heart to do it, and he thinks they are there to this day."

Blind! I had never thought of that; and while I was grasping the idea now, and fitting it to the facts, a light footstep sounded in the hall, and a woman's voice on the stairs; such a voice and such a footstep that, as it seemed to me, a man, if nothing else were left to him, might find home in them alone. "Your mistress," I said presently, when the sounds had died away upon the floor above, "has a sweet voice; but has not something annoyed her?"

"Well, I never should have thought that you would have noticed that!" exclaimed the housekeeper, who was, I dare say, many other things besides housekeeper. "You have a sharp ear, sir; that I will say. Yes, there is a something has gone wrong; but to think that an American gentleman should have noticed it!"

"I am not an American," I said, perhaps testily.

"Oh, indeed, sir! I beg your pardon, I am sure. It was just your way of speaking made me think it," she replied; and then there came a second louder rap at the door as John, who had gone upstairs with his mistress, came down in a leisurely fashion.

"That is Lord Wetherby, drat him!" he said, on his wife calling to him in a low voice. He was ignorant, I think, of my presence. "He is to be shown into the library, and the mistress will see him there in five minutes; and you are to go to her room. Oh, rap away!" he added, turning towards the door, and shaking his fist at it. "There is many a better man than you has waited longer at that door."

"Hush, John. Do you not see the gentleman?" interposed his wife, with the simplicity

of habit. "He will show you out," she added rapidly to me, "as soon as his lordship has gone in, if you do not mind waiting another minute."

"Not at all," I said, drawing back into the corner as they went on their errands; but though I said, "Not at all," mine was an odd position. The way in which I had come into the house, and my present situation in a kind of hiding, would have made most men only anxious to extricate themselves. But I, while listening to John parleying with some one at the door, conceived a strange desire, or a desire which would have been strange in any other man, to see this thing to the end — conceived it and acted upon it.

The library? That was the room on the right of the hall, opposite to Mrs. Wigram's sitting-room. Probably, nay I was certain, it had another door opening on the passage in which I stood. It would cost me but a step or two to confirm my opinion. When John ushered in the visitor by one door I had already, by way of the other, ensconced myself behind a screen, that I seemed to know would face it. I was going to listen. Perhaps I had my reasons. Perhaps — but there, what matter? I, as a fact, listened.

The room was spacious, but sombre, wainscoted and vaulted with oak. Its only visible occupant was a thin, dark man of middle size, with a narrow face, and a stubborn feather of black hair rising above his forehead; a man of Welsh type. He was standing with his back to the light, a roll of papers in one hand. The fingers of the other, drumming upon the table, betrayed that he was both out of temper and ill at ease. While I was still scanning him stealthily — I had never seen him before — the door was opened, and Mrs. Wigram came in. I sank back behind the screen. I think some words passed, some greeting of the most formal, but though the room was still, I failed to hear it, and when I recovered myself he was speaking.

"I am here at your wish, Mrs. Wigram, and your service, too," he was saying, with an effort at gallantry which sat very ill upon him, "although I think it would have been better if we had left the matter to our solicitors."

"Indeed."

"Yes. I fancied you were aware of my opinion."

"I was; and I perfectly understand, Lord Wetherby, your preference for that course," she

replied, with sarcastic coldness, which did not hide her dislike for him. "You naturally shrink from telling me your terms face to face."

"Now, Mrs. Wigram! Now, Mrs. Wigram! Is not this a tone to be deprecated?" he answered, lifting his hands. "I come to you as a man of business upon business."

"Business! Does that mean wringing advantage from my weakness?" she retorted.

He shrugged his shoulders. "I do deprecate this tone," he repeated. "I come in plain English to make you an offer; one which you can accept or refuse as you please. I offer you five hundred a year for this house. It is immensely too large for your needs, and too expensive for your income, and yet you have in strictness no power to let it. Very well, I, who can release you from that restriction, offer you five hundred a year for the house. What can be more fair?"

"Fair? In plain English, Lord Wetherby, you are the only possible purchaser, and you fix the price. Is that fair? The house would let easily for twelve hundred."

"Possibly," he retorted, "if it were in the open market. But it is not."

"No," she answered rapidly. "And you, hav-

ing the forty thousand a year which, had my husband lived, would have been his and mine; you who, a poor man, have stepped into this inheritance — you offer me five hundred for the family house! For shame, my lord! for shame!"

"We are not acting a play," he said doggedly, showing that her words had stung him in some degree. "The law is the law. I ask for nothing but my rights, and one of those I am willing to waive in your favor. You have my offer."

"And if I refuse it? If I let the house? You will not dare to enforce the restriction."

"Try me," he rejoined, again drumming with his fingers upon the table. "Try me, and you will see."

"If my husband had lived ——"

"But he did not live," he broke in, losing patience, "and that makes all the difference. Now, for Heaven's sake, Mrs. Wigram, do not make a scene! Do you accept my offer?"

For a moment she had seemed about to break down, but her pride coming to the rescue, she recovered herself with wonderful quickness.

"I have no choice," she said with dignity.

"I am glad you accept," he answered, so much relieved that he gave way to an absurd burst of gen-

erosity. "Come!" he cried, "we will say guineas instead of pounds, and have done with it!"

She looked at him in wonder. "No, Lord Wetherby," she said, "I accepted your terms. I prefer to keep to them. You said that you would bring the necessary papers with you. If you have done so I will sign them now, and my servants can witness them."

"I have the draft and the lawyer's clerk is no doubt in the house," he answered. "I left directions for him to be here at eleven."

"I do not think he is in the house," the lady answered. "I should know if he were here."

"Not here!" he cried angrily. "Why not, I wonder! But I have the skeleton lease; it is very short, and to save delay I will fill in the particulars, names, and so forth myself, if you will permit me to do so. It will not take me twenty minutes."

"As you please. You will find a pen and ink on the table. If you will kindly ring the bell when you are ready, I will come and bring the servants."

"Thank you. You are very good," he said smoothly; adding, when she had left the room, "and the devil take your impudence, madam! As

for your cursed pride — well, it has saved me twenty-five pounds a year, and so you are welcome to it. I was a fool to make the offer." And with that, now grumbling at the absence of the lawyer's clerk, and now congratulating himself on the saving of a lawyer's fee, my lord sat down to his task.

A hansom cab on its way to the East India Club rattled through the square, and under cover of the noise I stole out from behind the screen, and stood in the middle of the room looking down at the unconscious worker. If for a minute I felt strongly the desire to raise my hand and give my lordship such a surprise as he had never in his life experienced, any other man might have felt the same; and as it was I put it away and only looked quietly about me. Some rays of sunshine piercing the corner pane of a dulled window fell on and glorified the Wetherby coat-of-arms blazoned over the wide fireplace, and so created the one bright spot in the bare, dismantled room, which had once, unless the tiers of empty shelves and the yet lingering odor of Russia lied, been lined from floor to ceiling with books. My lord had taken the furniture; my lord had taken the books; my lord had taken — nothing but his rights.

Retreating softly to the door by which I had entered, and rattling the handle, I advanced afresh into the room. "Will your lordship allow me?" I said, after I had in vain coughed twice to gain his attention.

He turned hastily and looked at me with a face full of suspicion. Some surprise on finding another person in the room and close to him was natural; but possibly also there was something in the atmosphere of that house which threw his nerves off their balance. "Who are you?" he cried in a tone which matched his face.

"You left orders, my lord," I explained, "with Messrs. Duggan and Poole that a clerk should attend here at eleven. I very much regret that some delay has unavoidably been caused."

"Oh, you are the clerk!" he replied ungraciously. "You do not look much like a lawyer's clerk."

Involuntarily I glanced aside, and saw in a mirror the reflection of a tall man with a thick beard and moustaches, gray eyes, and an ugly scar seaming the face from nose to ear. "Yet I hope to give you full satisfaction, my lord," I murmured, dropping my eyes. "It was understood that you needed a confidential clerk."

"Well, well, sir, to your work!" he replied irritably. "Better late than never; and after all it may be preferable for you to be here and see it duly executed. Only you will not forget," he continued hastily, with a glance at the papers, "that I have myself copied four — well, three — three full folios, sir, for which an allowance must be made. But there! Get on with your work. The handwriting will speak for itself."

I obeyed, and wrote on steadily, while the earl walked up and down the room, or stood at a window. Upstairs sat Mrs. Wigram, schooling herself, I dare swear, to take this one favor that was no favor from the man who had dealt out to her such hard measure. Outside a casual passer through the square glanced up at the great house, and seeing the bent head of the secretary and the figure of his companion moving to and fro, saw, as he thought, nothing unusual; nor had any presentiment — how should he? — of the strange scene which the room with the dingy windows was about to witness.

I had been writing for perhaps five minutes when Lord Wetherby stopped in his passage behind me and looked over my shoulder. With a jerk his eye-glasses fell, touching my shoulder.

"Bless my soul!" he exclaimed, "I have seen your handwriting somewhere; and lately too. Where could it have been?"

"Probably among the family papers, my lord," I answered. "I have several times been engaged in the family business in the time of the late Lord Wetherby."

"Indeed." There was both curiosity and suspicion in his utterance of the word. "You knew him?"

"Yes, my lord. I have written for him in this very room, and he has walked up and down, and dictated to me, as you might be doing now," I explained.

His lordship stopped his pacing to and fro, and retreated to the window on the instant. But I could see that he was interested, and I was not surprised when he continued with transparent carelessness. "A strange coincidence. And may I ask what it was upon which you were engaged?"

"At that time?" I answered, looking him full in the face. "It was a will, my lord."

He started and frowned, and abruptly resumed his walk up and down. But I saw that he had a better conscience than I had given him the credit

of possessing. My shot had not struck fairly where I had looked to place it; and finding this was so, I turned the thing over afresh, while I pursued my copying. When I had finished, I asked him — I think he was busy at the time cursing the absence of tact in the lower orders — if he would go through the instrument; and he took my seat.

Where I stood behind him, I was not far from the fireplace. While he muttered to himself the legal jargon in which he was as well versed as a lawyer bred in an office, I moved to it; and, neither missed nor suspected, stood looking from his bent figure to the blazoned shield, which formed part of the mantelpiece. If I wavered, my hesitation lasted but a few seconds. Then, raising my voice, I called sharply, "My lord, there used to be here —"

He turned swiftly, and saw where I was. "What the deuce are you doing there, sir?" he cried in boundless astonishment, rising to his feet and coming towards me, the pen in his hand and his face aflame with anger. "You forget —"

"A safe — a concealed safe for papers," I continued, cutting him short in my turn. "I have seen the late Lord Wetherby place papers in it more

than once. The spring worked from here. You touch this knob."

"Leave it alone, sir!" cried the peer furiously.

He spoke too late. The shield had swung gently outwards on a hinge, door-fashion, and where it had been, gaped a small open safe lined with cement. The rays of sunshine, that a few minutes before had picked out so brightly the gaudy quarterings, now fell on a large envelope which lay apart on a shelf. It was as clean as if it had been put there that morning. No doubt the safe was air-tight. I laid my hand upon it. "My lord!" I cried, turning to look at him with ill-concealed exultation, "here is a paper — I think, a will!"

A moment before the veins of his forehead had been swollen, his face dark with the rush of blood. His anger died down, at sight of the packet, with strange abruptness. He regained his self-control, and a moment saw him pale and calm, all show of resentment confined to a wicked gleam in his eye. "A will!" he repeated, with a certain kind of dignity, though the hand he stretched out to take the envelope shook. "Indeed, then it is my place to examine it. I am the heir-at-law, and I am within my rights, sir."

I feared that he was going to put the parcel into his pocket and dismiss me, and I was considering what course I should take in that event, when instead he carried the envelope to the table by the window and tore off the cover without ceremony. "It is not in your handwriting?" were his first words; and he looked at me with a distrust that was almost superstitious. No doubt my sudden entrance, my ominous talk, and my discovery seemed to him to savor of the devil.

"No," I replied unmoved. "I told your lordship that I had written a will at the late Lord Wetherby's dictation. I did not say — for how could I know? — that it was this one."

"Ah!" He hastily smoothed the sheets, and ran his eyes over their contents. When he reached the last page there was a dark scowl on his face, and he stood a while staring at the signatures; not now reading, I think, but collecting his thoughts. "You know the provisions of this?" he presently burst forth with violence, dashing the back of his hand against the paper. "I say, sir, you know the provisions of this?"

"I do not, my lord," I answered. Nor did I.

"The unjust provisions of this will," he repeated, passing over my negative as if it had not

been uttered. "Fifty thousand pounds to a woman who had not a penny when she married his son! Aye, and the interest on another hundred thousand for her life! Why, it is a prodigious income, an abnormal income — for a woman! And out of whose pocket is it to come? Out of mine, every stiver of it! It is monstrous! I say it is! How am I to keep up the title on the income left to me, I should like to know?"

I marvelled. I remembered how rich he was. I could not refrain from suggesting that he had still remaining all the real property. "And," I added, "I understood, my lord, that the testator's personalty was sworn under four hundred thousand pounds."

"You talk nonsense!" he snarled. "Look at the legacies! Five thousand here, and a thousand there, and hundreds like berries on a bush! It is a fortune, a decent fortune, clean frittered away! A barren title is all that will be left to me!"

What was he going to do? His face was gloomy, his hands were twitching. "Who are the witnesses, my lord?" I asked in a low voice.

So low — for under certain conditions a tone conveys much, very much — that he shot a stealthy

glance towards the door before he answered, "John Williams."

"Blind," I replied in the same low tone.

"William Williams."

"He is dead. He was Mr. Alfred's valet. I remember reading in the newspaper that he was with his master, and was killed by the Indians at the same time."

"True. I remember that that was the case," he answered huskily. "And the handwriting is Lord Wetherby's." I assented. Then for fully a minute we were silent, while he bent over the will, and I stood behind him looking down at him with thoughts in my mind which he could as little fathom as could the senseless wood upon which I leaned. Yet I too mistook him. I thought him, to be plain, a scoundrel; and — well, so he was — but a mean one. "What is to be done?" he muttered at length, speaking rather to himself than to me.

I answered softly, "I am a poor man, my lord," while inwardly I was quoting "*quem Deus vult perdere.*"

My words startled him. He answered hurriedly, "Just so! just so! So shall I be when this cursed paper takes effect. A very poor man!

A hundred and fifty thousand gone at a blow! But there, she shall have it! She shall have every penny of it; only," he concluded slowly, "I do not see what difference one more day will make."

I followed his downcast eyes, which moved from the will before him to the agreement for the lease of the house; and I did see what difference a day would make. I saw and understood and wondered. He had not the courage to suppress the will; but if he could gain a slight advantage by withholding it for a few hours, he had the mind to do that. Mrs. Wigram, a rich woman, would no longer let the house; she would be under no compulsion to do so; and my lord would lose a cheap residence as well as his hundred and fifty thousand pounds. To the latter loss he could resign himself with a sigh; but he could not bear to forego the petty gain for which he had schemed. "I think I understand, my lord," I replied.

"Of course," he resumed nervously, "you must be rewarded for making this discovery. I will see that it is so. You may depend upon me. I will mention the case to Mrs. Wigram, and — and, in fact, my friend, you may depend upon me."

"That will not do," I said firmly. "If that be

all, I had better go to Mrs. Wigram at once, and claim my reward a day earlier."

He grew very red in the face at receiving this check. "You will not in that event get my good word," he said.

"Which has no weight with the lady," I answered politely but plainly.

"How dare you speak so to me?" his lordship cried. "You are an impertinent fellow! But there! How much do you want?"

"A hundred pounds."

"A hundred pounds for a mere day's delay, which will do no one any harm!"

"Except Mrs. Wigram," I retorted dryly. "Come, Lord Wetherby, this lease is worth a thousand a year to you. Mrs. Wigram, as you well know, will not voluntarily let the house to you. If you would have Wetherby House you must pay me. That is the long and the short of it."

"You are an impertinent fellow!" he repeated.

"So you have said before, my lord."

I expected him to burst into a furious passion, but I suppose there was a something of power in my tone, beyond the mere defiance which the words expressed; for, instead of doing so, he eyed me with a thoughtful, malevolent gaze, and paused

to consider. "You are at Poole and Duggan's," he said slowly. "How was it that they did not search this cupboard, with which you were acquainted?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "I have not been in the house since Lord Wetherby died," I said. "My employers did not consult me when the papers he left were examined."

"You are not a member of the firm?"

"No, I am not," I answered. I was thinking that, so far as I knew those respectable gentlemen, no one of them would have helped my lord in this for ten times a hundred pounds. My lord! Faugh

He seemed satisfied, and taking out a note-case laid on the table a little pile of notes. "There is your money," he said, counting them over with reluctant fingers. "Be good enough to put the will and envelope back into the cupboard. To-morrow you will oblige me by rediscovering it — you can manage that, no doubt — and giving information at once to Messrs. Duggan and Poole, or Mrs. Wigram, as you please. Now," he continued, when I had obeyed him, "will you be good enough to ask the servants to tell Mrs. Wigram that I am waiting?"

There was a slight noise behind us. "I am here," said some one. I am sure that we both jumped at the sound, for though I did not look that way, I knew that the voice was Mrs. Wigram's, and that she was in the room. "I have come to tell you, Lord Wetherby," she went on, "that I have an engagement from home at twelve. Do I understand, however, that you are ready? If so, I will call in Mrs. Williams."

"The papers are ready for signature," the peer answered, betraying some confusion, "and I am ready to sign. I shall be glad to have the matter settled as agreed." Then he turned to me, where I had fallen back, as seemed becoming, to the end of the room, and said, "Be good enough to ring the bell if Mrs. Wigram permit it."

As I moved to the fireplace to do so, I was conscious that the lady was regarding me with some faint surprise. But when I had regained my position and looked towards her, she was standing near the window gazing steadily out into the square, an expression of disdain rendered by face and figure. Shall I confess that it was a joy to me to see her fair head so high, and to read even in the outline of her girlish form a contempt which I, and I only, knew to be so justly based?

For myself, I leant against the edge of the screen by the door, and perhaps my hundred pounds lay heavily on my heart. As for him, he fidgeted with his papers, although they were all in order, and was visibly impatient to get his bit of knavery accomplished. Oh! he was a worthy man! And Welshman!

"Perhaps," he presently suggested, for the sake of saying something, "while your servant is coming, you will read the agreement, Mrs. Wigram. It is very short, and, as you know, your solicitors have already seen it in the draft."

She bowed, and took the paper negligently. She read some way down the first sheet with a smile, half careless, half contemptuous. Then I saw her stop — she had turned her back to the window to obtain more light — and dwell on a particular sentence. I saw — God! I had forgotten the handwriting! — I saw her gray eyes grow large and fear leap into them as she grasped the paper with her other hand, and stepped nearer to the peer's side. "Who," she cried, "who wrote this? Tell me! Do you hear? Tell me quickly!"

He was nervous on his own account, wrapt in his own piece of scheming, and obtuse.

"I wrote it," he said, with maddening complacency. He put up his glasses and glanced at the top of the page she held out to him. "I wrote it myself, and I can assure you that it is quite right, and a faithful copy. You do not think —"

"Think! Think! no, no! This, I mean! Who wrote this?" she cried, awe in her face, and a suppliant tone, — strange as addressed to that man, — in her voice.

He was confounded by her vehemence, as well as hampered by his own evil conscience.

"The clerk, Mrs. Wigram, the clerk," he said petulantly, still in his fog of selfishness. "The clerk from Messrs. Duggan and Poole's."

"Where is he?" she cried out breathlessly. I think she did not believe him.

"Where is he?" he repeated in querulous surprise. "Why here, of course. Where should he be, madam? He will witness my signature."

Would he? Signatures! It was little of signatures I recked at that moment. I was praying to Heaven that my folly might be forgiven me, and that my lightly planned vengeance might not fall on my own head. "Joy does not kill," I was saying to myself, repeating it over and over

again, and clinging to it desperately. "Joy does not kill!" But oh! was it true in the face of that white-lipped woman?

"Here!" She did not say more, but gazing at me with great dazed eyes, she raised her hand, and beckoned to me. And I had no choice but to obey — to go nearer to her, out into the light.

"Mrs. Wigram," I said hoarsely, my voice sounding to me only as a whisper, "I have news of your late — of your husband. It is good news."

"Good news?" Did she faintly echo my words? or, as her face from which all color had passed peered into mine, and searched it in infinite hope and infinite fear, did our two minds speak without need of physical lips? "Good news?"

"Yes," I whispered, "he is alive. The Indians did not —"

"Alfred!" Her cry rang through the room, and with it I caught her in my arms as she fell. Beard and long hair, and scar and sunburn, and strange dress — these which had deceived others — were no disguise to her — my wife. I bore her gently to the couch, and hung over her in a new paroxysm of fear. "A doctor! Quick! A

doctor!" I cried to Mrs. Williams, who was already kneeling beside her. "Do not tell me," I added piteously, "that I have killed her."

"No! no! no!" the good woman answered, the tears running down her face. "Joy does not kill!"

An hour later this fear had been lifted from me, and I was walking up and down the library alone with my thankfulness; glad to be alone, yet more glad, more thankful still, when John came in with a beaming face. "You have come to tell me—" I cried eagerly, pleased that the tidings had come by his lips—"to go to her? That she will see me?"

"Her ladyship is sitting up," he replied.

"And Lord Wetherby?" I asked, pausing at the door to put the question. "He left the house at once?"

"Yes, my lord, Mr. Wigram has been gone some time."

# Along the Garonne.

WE ascend the valley of the Garonne on our way to Pau, which we intended to use as a base of operations against the Pyrenees. Our route, as originally mapped out, lay by sea to Bordeaux, which is three days from Liverpool; and thence by rail to our destination, a journey merely of hours. But at the last moment we determined to postpone our stay at Pau, and instead to wander along the banks of the Garonne for a time, familiarizing ourselves with the ways of the country. Then, when we had rubbed off our insular corners against the Great French Politeness, and perfected our grasp of the language in talk with the Agenois villagers, we proposed to drop gently into Pau, armed at all points, and scarcely distinguishable from Frenchmen.

So we planned: and so it came about that we were free to enjoy ourselves and look about us

critically, as the smoky little tender bore us up the wide channel of the Gironde from Pauillac, where our ship bound for South America had contemptuously dropped us, to Bordeaux itself. A little below the city, the Gironde, which is really the estuary of the Garonne and Dordogne, shrinks to the Garonne pure and simple, but under either name it seems equally a waste of turbid clay-laden waters. On our left hand a bright sun — the month was November — shone warmly on a line of low hills, formed of reddish earth, and broken by great marl quarries. Woods climbed about these, and here and there a village or a little town nestled under them. On our right the bank lay low, and was fringed with willows, the country behind it being flattish, planted as it seemed to us with dead thorn-bushes, and dotted sparely with modern castellated houses. Nevertheless it was towards this modest, almost dreary landscape that we gazed; it was of it we all spoke, and to it referred, as we named names famous as Austerlitz or Waterloo, names familiar in our mouths — and our butlers' — as household words. For are not more people versed in claret than in history? And this commonplace landscape, this western bank of the Gironde, a mere peninsula lying be-

tween the river and the low Atlantic coast, is called Medoc, and embraces all the best known Bordeaux vineyards in the world. It seems as if a single parish — say St. George's, Hanover Square, for that is a big one — might hold them all. There, see, is Château Lafitte. The vineyards of St. Estéphe and St. Julien we have just passed. Léoville and Latour are not far off. And now we are passing the Château of Margaux itself, and gaining experience, are beginning to learn that all those little thorn-bushes stuck about the fallows, as though to protect the ground-game from poachers' nets, are vines — vines of the *premier crû!* The vintage is over. The grapes, black, sour things, about the size of currants, have all been picked. Where we had looked to see the endless interlacings of greenery, and swelling clusters dropping fatness on a carpet of turf, we find only reddish fallows, and rows of dead gooseberry bushes.

But never mind, even though this be but the first of many disillusions, and though the "sunny south" become hourly a more humorous catchword. To-day the sun *is* warm, the breeze is soft, the custom-house officers are civil. We air — but with the caution due to convalescents, or

those of tender years — our shaky, tottering French, and get English answers. So we stride across the broad quays of Bordeaux, our hearts before us, our luggage behind, and ourselves in the best of spirits and tempers.

Bordeaux, as we saw it, was a cheerful, busy city, full of wide streets and open spaces and handsome buildings; a bright clean, airy, city with little smoke, an immense water frontage, and one very fine bridge: a pleasant etherealized Liverpool, in fact. The white blouses and blue trousers of the workmen, the soldiers' uniforms, the bare heads of some women and the gay 'kerchiefs, worn chignon-wise, of others, gave picturesqueness to the crowds circling about the kiosques, and reminded us, from time to time, that we were in a southern city. Not unnecessarily; for the thermometer fell on the day after our arrival to fifty degrees; and rain fell too, and we were quick to discover the true cause of French vivacity. The French have no fires at home. Consequently, when it is cold — and it often is very cold, even as far South as Bordeaux — their only resource is to go out, and jump about in such faint sunshine as they can find, and so make believe to be warm. Every one in Bordeaux seemed to be doing this that day.

We saw a number of churches, but I have jumbled them together in my mind, and dare not distinguish between the beauties of St. Seurin and St. Croix, St. Michel or the Cathedral. Only I attended a service on Sunday morning, and, having heard that no Frenchmen now went to church, noted with interest that of a large congregation one in every four was a man. But then Bordeaux is perhaps the most orthodox city in France, and primitive ideas, good and bad, still prevail in this southwestern province, peopled by descendants of the Huguenots and Albigenses, by devout Basques and simple Navarrese. And two things also in Bordeaux I remember — the semi-circular remains of a Roman amphitheatre, which no one visiting Bordeaux should omit to see; and, secondly, a lofty, detached spire of singular lightness and grace. It is called the Peyberland, and was built by Pierre Berland, who must have been an English subject.

His name strikes the vein of thought which was uppermost in my mind at Bordeaux. I found it impossible to forget that it had been for three centuries a half English city, and the capital of a half English province, ruled by an English king; or that up the wide Gironde, between the marly

banks, Edward the Black Prince must many a time have sailed in state. Sir John Chandos and Sir Walter Manny, and many another English worthy, knew these streets as well as they knew Eastcheap or Aldgate. John of Gaunt and Talbot of Shrewsbury dwelt here, as much at home and at their ease as in York or Leicester. It is impossible not to wonder at those old Englishmen; not to think of them with pride, as we remember how firmly, the roving blood of Dane and Norman young in their veins, they grasped this prize; how long they clung to it, how boldly they flaunted the French lilies in the eyes of France; how cheerfully they crowded year by year to cross the bay in open boats! And then what cosmopolitans they were, with their manors in Devon and Aquitane, their houses in London and Bordeaux; with perhaps a snug little box at Calais, and a farm or two in Maine. How trippingly French and Provençal, and the rougher English, passed over their tongues. They founded no empire — on the contrary they lost one. But they were the immediate ancestors of Elizabeth's sea-dogs, for all that. In holding Guienne through those three centuries their strength was wasted. When they lost it (1451), they turned upon one another, and the Wars of the

Roses took up half a century. After that they needed half-a-century's holiday to recruit themselves; and then out flashed the Vikings' spirit again — this time to better purpose — and under Drake and Grenville and Hawkins, they, the men of Poitiers and Sluys, made the greater England.

Even in Bordeaux they have left some traces of their work. They built this cathedral which stands here, in the third city of France. Their leopards are not yet effaced from the walls of yonder castle. Their dogs — *les dogues des Anglais*, our waiter dubbed them, on seeing us fondle them — play about the streets, and sniff with a special friendliness at English calves. Indeed, I never saw such a place for bull-dogs — chiefly brindled ones — as Bordeaux. We drank a toast after dinner the evening before we left. It was, *Les dogues des Anglais!*

Bordeaux, being like London too high on the river to get the sea-breeze, has its Brighton at Arcachon. To reach the latter from the city, a railway passes some thirty miles westward across a tract of light, sandy soil, thinly clothed with woods. As you glide through these, now in sunshine, now in shade, you catch a glimpse here and there of clearings and wooden shanties, and groups

of peasants leaning on axes. Then, scarcely descending, you find yourself on the seashore, with the Bay of Biscay before you. Nearer, a basin of deepest blue, almost cut off from the outer sea by a reef of the dunes, forms a glorified harbor. Along this basin runs a broad beach, backed by a row of magnificent hotels with spacious terraces; and behind these lie two or three streets of rather paltry shops and restaurants. Having seen all this — the *plage*, the hotels, the terraces, the streets — you fancy you have seen Arcachon, and are inclined to be disappointed. But this is not Arcachon proper, which lies at the back of all this, and at the back even of that fairy-like Casino that rises on the abrupt slope of the sand-dunes behind us, and seemed the rear of all things. For on the land-side of the Casino is a forest of pines and larches, wild, far stretching, and apparently illimitable: a forest that is perpetually running up one sand-hill and down another, as if it were trying to get a view of the sea, and were not easily satisfied. And amid the vivid greens and dull blues of the foliage, glitter here and there and everywhere the daintiest of Swiss chalets or Indian bungalows, bright boxes of wood and stucco, colored and painted, and fretted and carved so delicately that

one would infer that rain never fell here; or else that these were not intended for out-of-door wear. Mere toys they seem, set in smooth lawns. Flowers glow about them, and the scent of the pines is everywhere, and everywhere are shady aisles of trees hung with white mosses, and leading into the gloom of the forest. Nature and luxury have come together here; the result is that soft, languid, southern beauty, Mademoiselle Arcachon — of the Théâtre des Folies Bordelaises. Yet is her constitution tolerably strong — thanks to the Atlantic breezes, though the sun was bright on the day we visited her, the wind was cold and the thermometer scarcely above forty degrees. This in early November.

The next evening saw us enter a very different place in a different way. For leaving Bordeaux we reached La Réole on foot and at dusk, welcomed only by the fantastic rays of a few swinging oil lamps. La Réole is the antipodes to Arcachon. It is a small, ancient town, which, small as it is, has a great place in Froissart and Davila, and still frowns bravely down upon the rich plain of the Garonne. It stands on a steep, cloven hill that rises sheer from the wide, yellow, rush-bordered river about forty miles above Bordeaux. On the

crest above the Garonne stands a castle once English, and in size and position not unlike that at Chepstow. Beside it are a church, a modern château, and a *place* of modern houses. Upon the second crest, and in the cleft between the two, are huddled together the steep alleys and crazy tottering houses, all corners and gables, of the old town. A stream on which are several mills pours through the ravine, being overhung by tall, delapidated houses of three stories, with as many sets of wooden balconies and outside stairs. One might almost step across the water from one balcony to another, so much do the houses bulge. We took infinite delight in the old-world quaintness of this scene, in the air of decay that hung about all things, in the crumbling coats of arms, the wavy, tiled roofs, the sinking houses, the swinging lanterns; above all in the gray walls of the castle, brightened here and there by the pure discs of a rose bush, or the green of ivy.

Froissart has a very pretty story — and a strange story too — to tell of La Réole. He says that Sir Walter Manny being with the English besieging it, "was reminded of his father;" that he had heard in his infancy that he had been buried there, or in that neighborhood. (Is there not a pleasant

smack about that "was reminded of," and that dubious "he had heard in his infancy"?) The elder Manny, the chronicler explains, had unluckily wounded to death in a tournament at Cambray a Gascon knight; and by way of penance had agreed to go on a pilgrimage to the shrine of St. James of Compostella, at Santiago in Spain. On his return he passed near La Réole, and hearing that the brother of the King of France was besieging it, stayed to visit him; and going home one night from the royal hotel to his lodgings, was waylaid and murdered. The Gascon's kinsmen were strongly suspected of the foul deed; but they were powerful, "and none took the part of the Lord of Manny." So he was buried in a small chapel outside La Réole; and was almost forgotten when his son, being in the neighborhood, raked up the old story, and offered a reward of a hundred crowns to any one who could show him the grave. This an old man volunteered to do, and took Sir Walter to a tomb which was further identified by a Latin inscription. Thereupon, the son, as pious as brave — a subject of Queen Philippa of Hainault, I fear, and not a trueborn Englishman, though he died in London, was buried in the Charter House, and left his lands "on either side of the sea" to the Earl

of Pembroke — had the remains conveyed to Valenciennes in Hainault, and buried there.

And so the story ends. But is it not a quaint and pretty story, and does it not smack of the times when the knight errant was one day tourneying at Cambray, and the next kneeling at Santiago, and on the third was waylaid at La Réole? And does it not plaintively suggest how, after long days of waiting, the news, still dim and uncertain, came through to the quiet castle in Hainault, news so dim, so uncertain, that the good son, when chance brought him to the scene of his father's death, could but faintly remember that it had happened there or thereabouts?

We seemed to be for a few days in a world of dying things. If La Réole was old and decadent, and showed few signs of former strength, the next place to which we came was still farther gone in decay. Port St. Marie is a straggling town lying low in a bend of the river. Most of its houses — they are large, with heavy doorways — are built in frameworks of wood after the style of our black and white houses, and have the spaces between the beams filled with bricks; long, thin bricks of close texture and the old Roman shape, set sometimes on end, sometimes lengthwise, more often aslant;

any way so that they may fill the interstices. A large number of these houses are of three stories; and each upper story projecting two or three feet beyond the one below it, the buildings seem really nodding to their fall. Many were empty, with unglazed windows, and flapping shutters, and sinking corners; and yet the stout timbers, seasoned perhaps when Simon de Montfort was governor of Guienne and had his court in Bordeaux, held together, and bound up the crumbling clay. Above one door ran the legend "*Le Couronné dut devoir*," a sufficiently chivalrous motto. Above others were battered stone shields. On all was the stamp of assured ruin. Neglect and poverty were written large everywhere. Time had touched the place with no caressing hand, such as

> Makes old bareness picturesque,
> And tufts with grass a feudal tower,

but with mean and sordid fingers; and the result was pitifully dreary. It made our hearts ache. The very people we saw in the streets looked pallid and hopeless, like people going down the hill. Such a town, so desolate, so moribund, does not exist, thank heaven, in our more populous England. Yet in our way we enjoyed it. We gloated

with something of the zest of ghouls over its decay, until having cloyed our souls with sadness, we got hurriedly away into the sunshine and the fields, where the patient, fawn-colored oxen were dragging the plough, and the countryman stood leaning on his goad to see us pass between the rows of poplars. No doubt he thought us mad to be toiling out of St. Marie with our faces set countrywards, when no great distance off lay the railway, which would take us in a few hours to Bordeaux, to the delights of café and boulevard. "Oh! but they are droll, these English!"

Any one leaving St. Marie must remark a singular, conical hill which rises abruptly from the plain before him. It is topped by a wooden steeple, while the dark outlines of walls and towers form a crown about its summit, and a row of cypresses rising solemnly above the lower buildings impart something of mystery to the place. It seemed to me like nothing so much as Mont St. Michel. In vain we ransacked our guide books. We could find no word of this fortress town which looked down on road and river; only in our map we discovered that its name was Clermont Dessus. Nothing daunted, however, we discovered a field path, and, climbing the hill, passed through a ruined

gateway into the silence of the place. On three sides the walls were yet fairly perfect, and within them stood some fifty houses, many in ruins, more empty, a few inhabited. The floor of one was on a level with the roof of another, and the only means of access was by steep, tortuous alleys. The church had been partially restored, but was old and still bore marks of violent usage. The graveyard on a terrace displayed twenty-four cypresses, and an ancient stone cross. Above all this rose the ruins of a castle, smaller than that at La Réole and with traces of more recent occupation. Woodwork and iron still remained adhering to the walls. What, we wondered, had been its history. A few women and children were the only human creatures it held, and we could gather nothing from them save that it belonged, or had belonged, to the "Seigneur." For our climb, however, we felt amply rewarded by the view over the valley of the Garonne, and so ran quickly down the hill and stepped out stubbornly for Agen, which we reached after twice losing our way through a too ardent desire to cling to a pleasant green path by the river.

It was dark when, footsore and tired, we gained the principal street; and we failed to discover our

hotel. "Would you direct us to the Hôtel de St. Jean?" I asked a decent-looking man who was passing.

"How, monsieur?" he replied, after so long a pause that I feared he did not understand me; "the Hôtel de St. Jean no longer exists. It has been closed a year and more."

We looked at each other in silent disgust; and he looked at us. We were fairly tired out. "Would you have the kindness, then, to tell us which is the best hotel?" I said with resignation.

"I will conduct you to the Hôtel de St. ——," he answered, quickly. "It is an hotel of the first class."

But when I saw the Hôtel de St. ——, we knew him for a swindler. It was a miserable place, and we would have none of it. We courteously said that we did not like it. He insisted. We broke away from him, and in a few minutes came upon the Hôtel de St. Jean, its doors open to welcome us, and the light pouring ruddily from its windows. The story is trivial: I tell it because it was my ill-luck more than once to fall into the hands of this kind of tout, and be deceived by the tale that the house to which I had been advised to

go was shut. On one occasion, at Guelmah, in Algeria, I was lured while inquiring for the Hôtel d'Orient into the Hôtel Auriol, a miserable place. In the morning I looked out of my window, and to my astonishment saw the name of the hotel in which I believed myself to be staring me in the face, painted up in large letters over the door of a house on the farther side of the square. I rubbed my eyes and wondered, and it was not until I stood in the open, and read the name of one and the other, that I recognized with a hearty laugh how I had been taken in.

From Agen, on a fine, sunny morning, we went by rail to Moissac. Here, attached to the church, is the most delightful cloister in the world, a cloister rich in arches and capitals of delicate tracery poised on slender shafts, and half hidden by luxuriant creepers, through which the light falls soft and green-tinged, as in some sea-grotto. It is a place for rest and reflection, perfectly adapted to a hot climate; whereas, he who has only seen the dull, dank portico enclosing danker grave-stones, the play-ground of cats — which in England we call a cloister — does not know what the thing is. This church boasted also a quaint doorway enriched with the more or less coarse designs in

which the monks of yore took pleasure: a doorway reputed to be one of the most curious in France.

From Moissac we went on foot to Castel Sarrasin, sometimes by the Tarn, but for the most part by the side of the great canal; and always, whether by the latter or the river, moving in a soft symphony of various greens, green streams, green poplars — and oh! such vistas of them! — green willows, green banks — all mingled together and fading into one another, and harmoniously blending as the evening fell with the pale pea-green of the eastern sky. It was a peaceful and silent walk through a world of restful hues.

From Castel Sarrasin, once no doubt a stronghold of the Moors, to Montauban we went by train. Montauban, on the Tarn, is a busy place, but a picturesque one also. Standing on a rough, steep hill, the town is seamed and cleft by strange, deep valleys with precipitous sides. Crazy houses with roofs of tiles, so time-stained that they have the precise appearance of strips of bark, fill these ravines and lean against their walls. Gardens cling to the ledges of the rocks. Shrubs and flowers clothe the crannies. Wooden balconies hang everywhere — and clothes-lines. We were

there on market-day, and watched with amusement the teams of oxen — all fawn-colored — coming in for sale, or dragging into town the lumbering carts (much like timber-wagons, with boxes about the middle) in which Madame sat with her produce about her. Monsieur walked before the oxen, his goad on his shoulder, and a white night-cap on his head. Oxen push, they do not pull. They shove inwards against one another, the near legs of the near ox and the off legs of the off ox being protruded at a considerable angle to get a good purchase. Very frequently only the feet so used are shod. The driver always goes before them, and as they follow with lowered heads, they are perfect images of patient resignation.

An old farmer, stout and jolly-looking, presently met us loitering on the bridge, and after a long period of staring, spoke to us. "Are you Germans?" he asked.

"No," I replied with courteous determination, "we are English." He still eyed us with some suspicion, and after a pause fell to questioning us about our country. Had we bread, and what kind of bread? had we any railways?

"Yes," I answered proudly to this last, "we have trains that travel at the rate of a hundred *kilo-*

*mètres* an hour!" A trifling exaggeration it may be, but human and pardonable.

He gravely nodded his head, however, as if he believed it, and meant to pose his wife and neighbors with it when he reached home. "You have grapes and wine?" he continued.

"We grow grapes under glass," I explained, "in glass houses. In the open air it is generally too cold for them."

"What!" he exclaimed, his jovial face clouding over as it occurred to him that I was not in earnest. "Will you kindly say that again?"

I did as he wished. But when I had made the matter as clear as I could, he answered stoutly, "No! It is impossible! Either I do not understand you, or you do not understand me!" And he went on his way in a passion. He could believe in the Irish Mail; but the cultivation of vines under glass was a thing outside his ideas of the world's economy.

From the *place* at Montauban, an open space pleasantly laid out on the brow of the hill, it is said that the Pyrenees can be seen on a fine day. We had a fine day, but we saw no sign of the mountains — our land at Beulah — though we looked long and lingeringly.

Attracted by a name which seemed familiar to us, and had a ring about it as of feudal and knightly times, we made a diversion from here to Cahors on the Lot, an old city standing in a fertile basin, among bare, brown hills. We were disappointed in the first appearance of the town. The river still runs round three sides of it, but the ramparts have been turned into gardens where they have not been levelled; only one tower of the castle survives; and though there are some picturesque houses, the town is for the most part modern, and devoted to Gambetta who was born in it. The cathedral, surmounted by one heavy tower, backed by three domes in a row, is imposing in its bulky ugliness. Its floor is much lower than the market-place without: so that on entering through the west door you find a flight of steps before you, and the congregation at your feet immersed in candle-lit gloom. These steps at the Sunday morning service were crowded by kneeling hucksters and market-women with their baskets, who had quietly entered as a matter of course from the market, which was in full swing without, and were devoutly telling their beads, or listening to a sermon preached by a bishop — a Count-Bishop, too, whose pastoral ring was still a prominent feature

in the scene, so skilfully did he wave and display it. At Cahors we were much pleased with one of the bridges, from which rise three Flemish-looking towers. They form as many gateways, and from every point of view are singularly picturesque. This bridge may have stood there in its present state when Henry of Navarre did at Cahors his most famous deed. A strong garrison was at the time holding the city for the Catholic party, but Henry, smarting under the loss of La Réole, which had been betrayed by its governor, determined to seize Cahors. Accordingly he came to it with fourteen hundred men, and leaving one half of this force outside to cover his night attack, blew in a gate with a petard and entered with the rest, being himself the seventh to pass in. A furious battle in the streets ensued, but when day broke, the Huguenots had mastered a small part of the city only, and reinforcements for the enemy arriving, Henry's followers begged him to retire. "No!" he answered, fighting on with his back to a shop, "I will not retire! My only retreat from this town shall be the retreat of my soul from my body!" He kept his word. Street by street and house by house, he reduced the town, neither side asking or giving quarter. But it was not until the

fifth night after his entrance that he completely mastered the place, a feat which is generally allowed to stand highest among his warlike exploits.

At Cahors it was that we first came under the influence of his name; but thereafter it grew and grew, a bigger factor in the past, a more prominent object in our thoughts in the present, the farther south we travelled; until at Pau, his birthplace and capital, the son of Jeanne d'Albret, *the Béarnais*, the Navarrese, the Protector of the Religion, *Henri Quatre*, Henry the Great, seemed to fill all past history, and dwarf all other figures. We have in English story no royal personage, no prominent life even, at once so picturesque, so rich in surprises, so lovable, and so blameworthy. Hot-blooded and cool-headed, daring to rashness, astute to meanness, a professor and a profligate, merciful, affectionate, yet letting nothing intervene between him and his aims — who that is man shall judge him? Surely the wine which Henry's father raised to his new-born lips, the cold water which was dashed in his hour-old face, the national song his mother sang at his birth, did really reproduce themselves in his life.

Leaving Cahors in the evening, we slept at a

small village called Lelbenque, and were on foot before eight next day, and on our way across the hills to Caylus. The country through which we passed in the fresh morning air, a range of bleak lime-stone heights sparsely covered with oak trees, seemed thinly peopled, and little tilled. Here and there in the wooded depths of a valley, we came upon a sparkling brook and a few comfortable farm-houses nestling among fruit trees, and protected by abrupt limestone walls from the cold winds which swept across the uplands. The distance to Caylus was sixteen miles. There were no inns, and as we had breakfasted rather meagrely on coffee and bread, we were driven to beg something at one of the farm-houses. There were only women at home, and these were with reason astonished to see foreign tramps in that out-of-the-way district. They seemed even a little afraid of us, but we got what we wanted notwithstanding the growling of the dogs; and our offer of payment was declined with suspicious abruptness. I fancy that they suspected us of wanting change.

About mid-day we passed over the last ridge of the uplands, and saw below us a narrow fertile valley squeezed in between mountain-walls. Halfway through this gorge and in the middle of it, a

hill or rock rose abruptly almost to the height of a thousand feet. On this, lording it over the road, stood Caylus, its houses and gardens descending terrace by terrace from the castle-nucleus on the crest almost to the road. Very old was the church, about the porch of which are carved green animals in the act of nibbling one another's tails under the superintendence of St. Michael. We took it for St. Michael. Old, too, seemed the great stone house opposite, known as the *Maison du Loup*, and bearing uncouth masks and figures of wolves in high relief on its front. Older still we judged the market-place to be, which built of wood rests on stone pillars; and the heavy Arcade or "Row" which stands in the same tiny square with it, and the beetle-browed wynds that lead to it — all old, gray, heavy, time-stained, but still solid. In the market hall we noticed three ancient corn-measures; hollows scooped out in stones that formed part of the fabric of the hall, with to each a horizontal outlet or spout at the side, through which the grain when measured might escape into bag or basket. Even while we were examining these we remarked women sitting outside the doors about us, removing the grain from stalks of maize, and plaiting various articles with the straw.

The weather-beaten castle belongs to Madame St. Cyr, but was occupied when we visited it by Mr. Wilton, an Englishman, who was not at home. His housekeeper, however, kindly allowed us to go over the building, and we found the view from the leads of the keep — used, I suspect, as a smoking-room — very charming. Caylus, to sum up, is difficult of access and is not even named in "Murray," but I can highly recommend it as a quaint example of a mediæval town, such as cannot now be found in England without much searching.

From it we passed by means of a top-heavy, jingling country coach to St. Anthonin, and so by rail to Albi on the Tarn, Albi of the Albigenses, the unhappy sect whose fate confutes the saying that the blood of martyrs is the seed of the church. About Albi, from which place they took their name, they grew and flourished in the latter half of the twelfth century. But seventy years later, notwithstanding the attempt which their feudal lord, Raymond of Toulouse, made to protect them, they were virtually extinct. Save that they dissented from the Romish Church, their very doctrines are now unknown or to be found only in the writings of their enemies, and their story and fortunes are too often confounded with those of

the Waldenses. Simon de Montfort, the father of our Simon de Montfort, took a conspicuous part in the cruel deeds which attended their suppression. At the fall of Beziers, heretic and churchman were put to the sword together. "Slay all — God will know His own," said the gentle Abbot Arnold. And in a sense wisely: for it is only the man of half measures who fails as a persecutor. To be perfectly ruthless, perfectly thorough in the work, is to be successful also.

At any rate at Albi, which, like Cahors, stands among hills, there are no traces of the Albigenses left; not even such a story as rings about the name of Beziers with fire. Rather the great cathedral proclaims Rome's victory. Built externally of bricks, it is a huge blind oblong with an apsidal end. A swelling base and rounded buttresses add to its heavy appearance. Yet it is very lofty. The monstrous red tower hung about with giddy balconies rises nearly to the height of three hundred feet, while the church itself, the lower part of which has no openings or windows, seems half that height. In a word, the whole is as much a fortress as a cathedral. Lofty flights of steps lead to a raised porch, formed by three arches decorated with carvings lately and successfully re-

stored. Entering the church through this we find the interior a striking sight. In shape it is a vast hall surrounded by chapels in two stories, and with a choir screened off at one end. The interior still remains in the state to which our Puritans objected, the state probably characterized more churches than we now imagine. It is covered from ceiling to floor with frescoes and paintings and scrollwork, some gaudy, some subdued, some good, some bad. The very statues are painted and gilded, and although here and there the effect is garish and unpleasing, I do not agree that the appearance of the whole, as the vast mass of color presents itself to the eyes, broken by the exquisite carvings of the stone screen or a bevy of tinted marbles, is absolutely unharmonious. I found it more pleasing than I expected. And then what would have been the effect of these plain walls in their naked monotony?

The paintings are mainly of the date of Francis I., say about 1520. Two frescoes of Hell and the Passions, done by Italian artists, cover the west end — cover acres of it as it seems; and in a chapel, among other anachronisms is a notable picture of Christ, in which He is figured in a hat and feather and the dress of a courtier of the time

in the midst of Roman soldiers who are kicking Him along. A great store of information as to the dresses and customs of the early part of the sixteenth century is laid up here, to be ransacked by any one who will take the trouble to closely inspect this huge interior. The groups painted upon the walls, groups of people fighting, tourneying, feasting, dancing, dying — ay, and doing many things scarcely adapted to church decoration — are to be counted by thousands; as are the gold stars that stud the bright blue ceiling. There is something suggestive in the portrayal of these things in this place; they seem to tell of a faith which, with all its scandals, abuses, and laxity, was bound up intimately with the life of the people, with their joys as well as their griefs; and so smacked of One who did not consider the price of sparrows as beneath knowledge.

At any rate we were pleased with these things. The interior of Albi Cathedral may not be in the best taste. It may be meretricious, it may be gilt rather than of gold. But it is curious; it is almost unique; it is a museum in itself; and to an Englishman accustomed to the cold if correct lines of a Gothic church, its warmth and color afford a not unwelcome change.

At Auch we arrived at night, and found it to be an old-fashioned archiepiscopal city on the summit and southern slope of a precipitous hill. Here we came upon the first traces — a Spanish pedler, a Navarrese bonnet — of that strange borderland between Spain and Western France in which three languages and a dozen *patois*, French, Spanish, Basque, the Langue d'Oc, the Langue d'Or, and Gascon and Provençal and the tongue of Andorra, and I know not what others, are fighting for the mastery: where two great nations now peaceably march, dividing between them the wild country where the kingdom of Navarre once sat enthroned on hills with the free Basque communities about her. It is a country rich in memories of independence, of strife; of brigandage, of romance; of the free life of the hunter; a land of snow-clad peaks and deep valleys, and rolling, wooded hills full of creatures elsewhere extinct, bears, and izards, and, shall I add, Basques. Here are Roncesvalles and the Bidassoa, Fontarabia and Orthez, San Sebastian and the Isle of Peacocks. Moor and Paladin, Scot and Spaniard, Charlemagne and Wellington, have all passed this way and left deep foot-prints.

And Auch stands on the verge of this strange country; an old city, but full of energy and with

no trace of decay. From the river, flights of wide steps with spacious landings, gay with flowers and fountains, climb the southern face of the hill, which the best road-maker would find impracticable. At the head of these steps and commanding extensive prospects stands the cathedral, a beacon to all the country between it and the skirts of the mountains. The building is fine, but its pride lies in the wood carvings of the unrivalled choir. My guide, an ex-soldier, also pointed out with pride some cymbals presented to the cathedral by the first Napoleon: trophies, so he told me, of the Egyptian campaign.

We wandered out in the afternoon to the brow of a ridge of hills lying on the far side of the river, and throwing ourselves down upon some heather and bracken — it was a warm and sunny but not very clear day — began to cast speculative glances towards Spain. But while we thought that we were looking southwards our eyes were really turned too much to the east. And presently we discovered this in a strange way. For glancing by chance towards the skyline on our right, we saw, first, a brown autumnal landscape of woods and hills, and beyond this a long, gray cloud, the horizon, as we thought; and above that — ah! what was it we

saw above that? A line of silvery peaks, gleaming in a gray, sheeny atmosphere of their own, so pure, so soft, so far above this world of ours, that as the words "The Pyrenees!" broke the first moments of astonished silence, we felt that for once the thing long looked for had passed our expectations! Our hearts fastened upon the distance. The pleasant landscape spread out before us lost its charms. It was homely, it was flat, it was commonplace, it was of the earth earthy, beside the serene beauty of the snowy crests and untrodden wastes that shone and sparkled in that far distance, and anon grew cold and dim as the veil of cloud was drawn before them even while we watched.

When they were gone, we felt that nothing save the mountains would now satisfy us. We had a craving for them, such as I have sometimes felt for the sea. A sudden conviction that we were wasting our time in a world of small things, while the wonders of the hills lay close at hand, overwhelmed us. We hurried homewards, talking of peaks, and glaciers, and passes, of Cauteret and Gavarnie, Mont Perdu and the Pic du Midi; and packed in the same state of pleasant excitement. The next morning saw us passing through the

same country, rich in autumn tints, in leafy bottoms, and rippling streams, which we had seen stretched out before us. And the evening saw us stand on the famous Place Royale, hard by the castle where Henry of Navarre was born, feasting our eyes on the cold, bright tints of the great mountains, seen sharp and clear above the Jurance hills, and listening to the rushing waters of the Gave. Our Garonne pilgrimage was over.

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